

**T**he term hadn't been coined in 1926, but that year witnessed a "media event" which would pale all subsequent media events almost into oblivion—the coverage and exploitation by the nation's press of the kidnapping case of evangelist Aimee Semple McPherson, pastor of Angelus Temple in Los Angeles.

For almost ninety consecutive days in the fall of that year newspapers across America blazoned stories on their front pages. Accusations and innuendoes unfavorable to the evangelist appeared in headlines, captions, and opening paragraphs of the dispatches, while what facts favorable to her the press presented usually were buried in fine print on inside pages.

Los Angeles at the time had at least six daily newspapers engaged in heated competition for circulation and advertising dollars. These seized upon the opportunity to wage a war to eclipse each other and brazenly bragged of scoops they achieved over their rivals. These periodicals virtually bankrolled the district attorney's and police department's investigative costs against the evangelist, as District Attorney Asa Keyes confirmed in defending his office against an outcry over the use of public funds for the purpose.

To this day when journalism rehashes the event, coverage is almost always confined to regurgitating exploded and discredited charges and rumors while ignoring the strong case which eventually vindicated the evangelist in 1927.

This book sets the record straight, documenting material, much of which never before got into print. Author Raymond Cox's research spanned more than 25 years and included examination of documents gathered by Mrs. McPherson's attorneys for the Superior Court trial which never proceeded because the district attorney on Jan. 10, 1927 admitted he did not have a case.

Corruption was rampant in the police department and district attorney's office in Los Angeles in the mid-'20s. Dope peddlers and bootleggers bought protection and openly operated speak-easies. Mrs. McPherson infuriated the underworld by publicizing hitherto secrets which her converts confessed, reading names and addresses over radio station KFSG. In the glare of that corruption and the press competition the story unfolds in **"THE VERDICT IS IN!"** The author vouches for his facts. It's high time truth prevails over falsehood.



RAYMOND COX

# The Verdict Is In

After fifty years... answers about the kidnapping of Aimee Semple McPherson

BY RAYMOND L. COX



# **The Verdict Is In**

**by Raymond L. Cox, Th.D., F.R.G.S.**

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# Preface

No other event in 1926 rated the publicity accorded by the media to the kidnapping on May 18 of Aimee Semple McPherson, Pastor of Angelus Temple, and her escape thirty-nine days later and subsequent reappearance on June 26. Many from the press and from the law did their utmost to discredit her story of the ordeal.

Millions assumed, "I know it's true because I read it in the newspapers." However, in 1926 and even now, what the media presents as truth often "ain't necessarily so." Journalist Henry Fairlie admitted this openly in a Washington Post syndication: "News is not what has happened; it is not 'the way it is.' It is an account of what a few people, journalists like myself, think has happened. Out of what we think has happened we select and elaborate, and we provide each day what is called the news. This is our job: to make the news up. That may sound like a shocking confession. It is, in fact, the only honourable description of journalism. We are engaged in 'making up' stories about the little we know of what goes on in the world." (October 11, 1976)

Few clearer examples exist of "making up" stories out of what journalists "think has happened" than the media's rehashing of the career of Foursquedom's founder, and especially in connection with her 1926 kidnapping.

The purpose of this book is to relate the kidnapping events as they actually happened, the reporting of same, and the subsequent grand jury and preliminary hearing. Over twenty-five years of diligent research have been involved in producing this accurate account of what took place.

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## CHAPTER 1

# Disappearance

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"WILL DYNAMITE SEA FOR BODY OF MRS. M'PERSON" blared two-inch high banner headlines on the front page of the Los Angeles *Record* newspaper on Wednesday, May 19, 1926.

The disappearance, presumably in the surf, of world famed evangelist Aimee Semple McPherson had developed too late the previous day to make the afternoon papers' regular editions. The *Times* and *Examiner* on the morning after gave the event prime coverage, somewhat to the dismay of Cecil B. De Mille and other Hollywood celebrities because the disappearance of the evangelist crowded the Hollywood premier of De Mille's extravaganza, "The Volga Boatman," off the front pages.

But it was Los Angeles' evening dailies which really made capital in publicizing the story and the subsequent search of the sea for a body which never turned up; that is until Mrs. McPherson stumbled into a Mexican village late at night on June 23 and told a tale of being kidnapped. The

reappearance came too late to make the morning papers, so the newspaper advantage was a stand-off. Two-and-one half inch high letters on the *Evening Express* screeched, "GRAPHIC KIDNAPPING STORY BY MRS. AIMEE M'PHERSON." The *Evening Herald* in fractionally shorter but bolder type screamed, "MRS. M'PHERSON ALIVE. TELLS OF ABDUCTION." The next morning's *Daily News* used three and one-eighth inch high headlines for the words "MAN HUNT" captioning a story of an initial posse seeking the kidnappers.

Press mortality has reduced the number of major daily newspapers in Los Angeles to the *Times* and *Herald-Examiner*, while radio and television newscasts have relegated "Extras" which made quick profits for the press into journalistic dinosaurs. But in 1926 newspapers stood almost unchallenged as the main source of news, and competition raged among them for circulation, which determined advertising revenues. Los Angeles had among its major dailies the *Times*, *Examiner*, and *Daily News* in the morning, plus the *Record*, the *Evening Express*, and the *Evening Herald* in the afternoons. There may have been others. And they all made the most out of the McPherson case.

This was several years before Perry Mason was born from the womb of Erle Stanley Gardner's typewriter. In the Mason mysteries, the fictional attorney continuously complained about district attorneys trying cases in the newspapers. Perry Mason articulated legal principles, which if known by the public in 1926, there may have resulted a difference in the handling of the McPherson case received in the press then and subsequently.

Los Angeles' District Attorney Asa Keyes certainly tried the McPherson case in the newspapers. If there was not conspiracy between his office and the press, there obviously was a collusion. Keyes admitted as much when, responding to public outcries about the cost to the county of prosecuting Mrs. McPherson, he announced that the newspapers had

underwritten most of the expense of the investigation, which sent police and prosecutors scurrying all over the country seeking evidence against the evangelist and hunting a fugitive with whom they charged her with consorting.

The District Attorney could not prove Mrs. McPherson guilty at the time. Keyes indeed threw in the towel on January 10, 1927, complaining that his star witness against the evangelist had changed her story so often as to cease to be a credible witness. The District Attorney could not prove Mrs. McPherson guilty then and dismissed the case against her. But the press has been trying to prove her guilty ever since. Virtually every rehash of the kidnapping case proceeds on the premise that Mrs. McPherson was "guilty unless proven innocent." Juries must acquit a defendant if reasonable doubt of guilt is established, but newsmen have no such restraints. Indeed, they have usually ignored completely, testimony favorable to Mrs. McPherson's story, while blaring the unfavorable publicity. Sometimes they have distorted the former to make it appear to be the latter.

Here's a case in point. Dial Torgeson wrote a resume of the case, entitled, "Aimee's Disappearance Remains Mystery." This appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* of May 18, 1969. The more than a page long rehash stated, among other things, "The owner of the Carmel cottage, who had been expected to be a witness against Mrs. McPherson, died, apparently of heart trouble brought on by the tens of thousands of sightseers trampling around his home" (section B, p.2). But H.C. Benedict did testify at the court hearing, which concluded weeks before his death on November 20, and his testimony helped Mrs. McPherson. For weeks Benedict had been denying vehemently that the woman who shackled up in his cottage with Kenneth Ormiston was Mrs. McPherson. Chapter twelve reproduces Benedict's sworn statement before District Attorney Keyes, charging that deputy prosecutor Ryan "tried his damndest" to get him to identify Mrs. McPherson. But Benedict insisted that there

wasn't a thing about the photos Ryan flashed that connected Mrs. McPherson with his female tenant.

None of the stories which recreate the event have reported Benedict's disclaimer. But several suggest the landlord would have testified against Mrs. McPherson. How could he when he told around that he was positive the woman was not the evangelist and that he could not be more certain of that, indeed, could not be mistaken? But Dial Torgeson also wrote, "Desert trackers said she couldn't have crossed twenty miles of desert unstained, unburned, only mildly thirsty." Indeed, tracker Murchison scouted the possibility the evangelist could have trekked from her place of escape from captivity and arrived in Agua Prieta in the condition reported. But several other desert trackers filled pages of testimony at the preliminary hearing with their demonstrations that she could have made the jaunt as claimed. The press never rehashes their testimony, but this book will.

What kind of journalism is it which reports a person's account of an ordeal, then ballyhoos the evidence which seems to contradict that account, while ignoring any evidence which tends to corroborate the account? It can be shown that this is exactly the kind of treatment the McPherson case gets from the overwhelming number of resumes.

Even unbiased investigators, as Lately Thomas thought he was in writing the books, "The Vanishing Evangelist" (Viking, New York, 1959) and "Storming Heaven" (Morrow, New York, 1970), are at a severe disadvantage in that their sources, except for materials published by Mrs. McPherson and her friends, almost invariably reflect the 'guilty until proven innocent' syndrome. "Lately Thomas," by the way, is not the real name of this biographer. He is Robert V.P. Steele, who got interested, he told me in a telephone conversation, in "that Aimee story" in an effort to escape his displeasure with Los Angeles. "I hated L.A.," he stated. So he buried himself in newspaper morgues investigating the clippings. When I

asked why he hated that city he replied, "Have you ever been there?", as if that were enough explanation. He was phoning from San Francisco. His chances of doing an objective biography using such sources were about comparable to those of an author researching Winston Churchill from Nazi or Fascist sources, or Billy Graham from the writings of John R. Rice or Bob Jones!

This book isn't objective or unbiased either. But it's about time Mrs. McPherson's story and the facts that support it get general publication. Suppose we proceed from the presumption "innocent until proven guilty" instead of the opposite premise. Can the evidence admit of such interpretation?

## CHAPTER 2

# Prosecution

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On November 3, 1926, after a preliminary hearing which had stretched into its sixth week in Division 2 of the Los Angeles Municipal Court, Judge Samuel R. Blake bound over for trial in Superior Court Aimee Semple McPherson and her mother, Minnie "Ma" Kennedy. The charge was criminal conspiracy.

The complaint which the District Attorney of Los Angeles, California had filed against the two of them, plus alleged co-conspirators Lorraine Wiseman-Sielaff, Kenneth G. Ormiston, John Doe, Richard Roe, and Sarah Moe, charged "conspiracy to commit acts injurious to public morals and to prevent and obstruct justice, and to obstruct and pervert the due administration of the laws of California," thus threatening "the peace and dignity of the People of the State of California."

Specifically, the People alleged that Aimee Semple McPherson "surreptitiously disappeared" on May 18, 1926 from the beach near Venice and reappeared at about 2 a.m. on the morning of June 23 in Mexico. The complaint informed that she "swore falsely, wickedly, and maliciously, with intent

to procure another to be charged, arrested, and indicted of the crime of kidnapping," said testimony being addressed to a Los Angeles grand jury at a time when she well knew she had not been kidnapped at all. The People accused that between May 19 and 26, Mrs. McPherson had "resided and remained concealed with goggles and other devices and contrivances at Carmel-by-the-Sea from which place she departed with Kenneth G. Ormiston, with the full knowledge, acquiescence, and consent of Minnie Kennedy." The complaint also charged that the evangelist and her mother hired Lorraine Wiseman-Sielaff to impersonate Mrs. McPherson and give false testimony tending to disprove the evangelist's presence at Carmel.

The preliminary hearing, which commenced on September 27, became the longest litigation of its kind in the history of Los Angeles courts, filling forty-two volumes of transcript with about 3500 pages of copy!

District Attorney Asa Keyes, who later went to San Quentin Penitentiary over irregularities in his office, personally directed the prosecutions case, a virtually unheard of procedure for a D.A. serving a county the size of Los Angeles. He associated with his two crack deputies, Dennison and Murray, while Joseph Ryan, who coveted the assignment; sat reluctantly on the sidelines, destined to serve only as a witness for the State. Ryan was the one who had developed the case against the evangelist, or as her friends charged - "manufactured the evidence."

As the People's case unfolded, it became unmistakable that the prosecution would expose its whole arsenal - all its evidence against the defendants. This was as unprecedented a procedure as the District Attorney's personal appearance in the hearing, for prosecutors generally jealously guard as much evidence as possible in a preliminary hearing, reserving it for the jury trial. The testimony of Mrs. Wiseman, "the Hoax woman," would have been enough to clinch the binding over of the defendants, as



matters go at preliminary hearings. Ralph Hersey's ridiculous identification of the evangelist on a Carmel street would have sufficed to make inevitable Judge Blake's adverse decision against the defendants. But Asa Keyes presented a list of about thirty-five witnesses and elicited from them testimony which completely exhausted all of the prosecution's evidence. Did Keyes recognize that he had no case before a jury — that presumption of "innocent until proven guilty" would boomerang against his vacillating witnesses — that the prosecution's own testimony in and of and by itself would betray sufficient "reasonable doubt" to demand the acquittal of the defendants?

If such was indeed the case, why would Asa Keyes proceed?

You have to understand the desperate compulsion which motivated this man in prosecuting defendants. He was out to make a record for himself as an invincible prosecutor. Once he dragged a victim into court, there were no holds barred in his attacks.

When this preliminary hearing began, Asa Keyes, whose last name "rhymes with 'tries,' 'lies,' and 'dies,'" as Lately Thomas quipped (p. 28, "The Vanishing Evangelist"), was smarting under the rebuke of California's Governor Richardson who rapped the Los Angeles official for convicting innocent defendants. The *Los Angeles Examiner* of September 25, 1926 reported that on the previous day the governor issued a pardon to T.H. Heape, whom Keyes had sent up to San Quentin the previous year for grand larceny. Richardson announced, "This is the sixth pardon I have given men convicted in Los Angeles county and later declared innocent by the district attorney." Keyes protested in his own defense, but the governor rebutted, "As it is the duty of the district attorney to seek justice rather than conviction, why did he not advise the jury to acquit?" (p. 6).

Keyes' conduct of the hearing and public statements during its course may be interpreted as almost deliberate

attempts to prejudice the public against the evangelist. How else can one explain his personal participation for five weeks in the hearing, his exposure of all the prosecution evidence, and his subsequent near-tirade against Mrs. McPherson at the time he dismissed the case against her? In effect he thundered, "She's guilty. I just can't prove it!"

That Judge Blake bound Mrs. McPherson over for trial gets more publicity than the fact that the District Attorney nine weeks later dismissed the case as hopeless for conviction. To many, an aura of guilt attaches to the binding over. But this is completely to misunderstand the nature of a preliminary hearing.

A preliminary hearing proceeds on almost the opposite philosophy of a jury trial. In Superior Court the defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty. In a preliminary hearing he is virtually presumed guilty unless proven innocent, which is almost an impossibility for the defense. Perry Mason pulls it off in fiction, but in real life courtroom drama it happens very rarely.

Why? Because the court in a preliminary hearing takes the testimony the prosecution produces at its face value. No matter what the defense does, if the prosecution can present a *prima facie* case, the judge generally binds over the defendant for trial. The court does not test the credibility of witnesses or weigh the evidence. If any witnesses connect a defendant with the crime, the judge binds over, regardless of how much evidence there may be in favor of the defendant. Conflicts in testimony are viewed in favor of the prosecution.

Thus Judge Blake had no choice but to bind over Mrs. McPherson and Mrs. Kennedy for Superior Court trial. Mrs. Wiseman-Sielaff testified the evangelist and her mother hired her to commit perjury. Ralph Hersey and others testified they saw Mrs. McPherson at Carmel. The decisive testimony of people who could prove that Mrs. McPherson was not the woman with Ormiston at Carmel — and that included the Town Marshall (sort of Police Chief), August England — could have

no bearing on Blake's decision, though it must have influenced a jury as - at worst - reasonable doubt, or at best - exoneration for the evangelist.

The chances are remote that in any preliminary hearing the defense could completely demolish the prosecution's case. The preponderance of evidence has no bearing, and questions of conflicting facts are resolved in favor of the prosecution. There are differing procedures in different courts.

In January of 1927, after Asa Keyes cried "Uncle" over the case, some of Mrs. McPherson's friends crowed exuberantly. The evangelist was pleased she would now be able to devote full-time to evangelistic efforts without the interruptions of daily court appearances. Her mother, however, would have preferred to be acquitted by a jury. Minnie Kennedy didn't agree altogether with the assessment of Judge Jacob F. Denny, formerly of the Fifty-eighth Judicial Circuit of Indiana and in 1927 a member of the bar in California. Denny declared,

"The vindication of Mrs. McPherson and Mrs. Kennedy could not be more complete. It is infinitely stronger than if it had been determined by a Jury after hearing all the evidence and resulting in an absolute acquittal. A jury passing on the case would naturally be supposed to be unbiased and to give an unprejudiced decision. But in the present case, the State of California, with all its machinery, power, and prestige, spent many thousands of dollars in the investigation of the truth of the charges which it had made against these women. These charges they admitted were all false.

"In addition to the ordinary investigation which it made by state officials, this case, by reason of its having excited national interest, was given special attention. For more than half a year the entire resource of the State of California was devoted to the unearthing of evidence against them. Special agents

were employed in great numbers to trace down every remote rumor that might throw light on the case.

"All of this evidence collected was reviewed by the officers themselves most interested in procuring a conviction and naturally supposed to be highly hostile to the defendants. This tribunal themselves determined that there was not sufficient evidence against the defendants even to justify placing them on trial before an unprejudiced jury.

"Seldom, if ever, in the history of American or English jurisprudence has so signal a vindication been achieved without a single gun being fired by the defendants in their own defense." (p. 1, "Foursquare Crusader," Jan. 22, 1927).

The judge was somewhat carried away with exaggeration, but his point was well-taken and his conclusions justified.

However, Mrs. McPherson's reputation might have been better served if the case had gone to trial. No jury could listen to the testimony adduced in the preliminary hearing without acquitting the defendants. And Mrs. McPherson's attorneys amassed considerable evidence they held back for the jury trial which never materialized because the prosecution chickened out!

## CHAPTER 3

# Snatch

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An evangelist in the New Testament vanished from Samaria and turned up in the desert. Philip reappeared on the road to Gaza (cf. Acts 8). For decades now journalists have oversimplified, "Almee walked out into the ocean and turned up in the desert." It wasn't that simple. It couldn't have been, no matter what happened.

Take the prosecution's allegations at their worst. They presuppose a complicated conspiracy and assume a deliberate attempt to deceive. But would anyone making up a story out of the whole cloth invent as unlikely a tale as Mrs. McPherson's account of her ordeal? The utter incredibility of the story argues for its truthfulness, for if the evangelist had wanted to lie she could have manufactured more believable circumstances. When pressed by authorities to modify her account in areas where changes might make it more plausible, Mrs. McPherson steadfastly stuck to her story as told in the beginning, insisting that it was the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

This consideration was one of the factors which helped

convince the Chief of Police at Douglas, Arizona, where the evangelist was brought across the border from Mexico, that Mrs. McPherson was telling the truth. Percy Bowden protested his faith in her story "because I don't see how any woman could create such a startling sequence of events in her mind" (quoted by Lately Thomas, "the Vanishing Evangelist," p. 86).

How did the evangelist vanish? Doubters speculated that Kenneth G. Ormiston, the former radio engineer at Angelus Temple, whisked the evangelist away from Ocean Park beach surreptitiously on the late afternoon of May 18, 1926. But no evidence of this escapade ever was hinted. No witnesses substantiated anything of the kind. The only extant story of the disappearance is that which Mrs. McPherson related after her return to civilization. Anything else is the sheerest hypothesis.

Angelus Temple was looking forward to the Tuesday night service when its woman pastor would continue her travelogue about the Holy Land from which she had returned a few weeks earlier. But shopping was on Mrs. McPherson's mind that morning. And kidnapping was about the furthest thing from her mind.

Yet threats had come to the Temple, warning the church to lay off exposes of the underworld. These revelations had not been contrived or programmed. But Mrs. McPherson's hosts of converts, in testifying of deliverances from past wrongdoings over the church's radio station K.F.S.G. - third oldest outlet in Los Angeles - had given names and addresses of bootleggers, speak-easies, and dope-peddlers. The public called these to the attention of the police, from whom some were purchasing protection. The authorities had no choice but to close up the illegal operations.

Mrs. McPherson ignored, as the work of cranks, numerous notes which arrived in the mail warning her to "lay off" or threatening kidnapping or death. In 1925 some reporters claimed they uncovered a plot to abduct her, but

she dismissed it as "impossible."

Elder A.M. Dickey of Angelus Temple told the press, after the disappearance, that a stranger came daily to the church during the three weeks preceding May 18 and warned he knew of a gang out to "get" Mrs. McPherson. The stranger demanded to see the evangelist, but was denied an interview. Dickey attached little importance to the incident in late May because he believed his pastor had drowned in the surf (Los Angeles Times, May 24, 1926). By that date, Mrs. McPherson may have been wishing she'd listened to the warning.

Mrs. McPherson left the parsonage next door to the Temple at about 10 a.m. on that fateful Tuesday. She drove downtown to look for a dress for her daughter Roberta and possibly one for herself, as well. She parked in front of Bullocks Department Store, where she purchased an outfit for her daughter. She found a black and white dress for herself, but wasn't quite sure it was just right. So she decided to have her secretary, Emma Schaeffer, come down later and look it over. She asked the saleswoman to hold the dress for her. May Dutton agreed.

What has all this to do with the disappearance? Testimony would later allege that Mrs. McPherson walked into the Clark Hotel carrying a briefcase with the name Aimee Semple McPherson inscribed in large letters. Witnesses would report seeing her there and suggest a rendezvous with Ormiston. But May Dutton furnished an affidavit placing Mrs. McPherson in her department at Bullocks throughout the time-period when other witnesses said they saw her at the hotel! Perhaps someone did tote in a briefcase with that name on it, but it was not the evangelist. She claimed she did not even own a briefcase, and that if she were to secure one she would not advertise her identity on it since already she was suffering nuisance approaches in public by people who recognized her. She admitted owning a smaller writing portfolio with her name on it, but that inscription was under the flap and therefore would not have been visible

when the portfolio was closed.

Aimee Semple McPherson arrived back at the parsonage about eleven, Harriet Jordan, a co-worker recalled. Her mother noted paleness and suggested she take an afternoon outing at the beach. Daughter invited mother to come along. Mrs. Kennedy declined, pleading church business. She was the manager. Though she didn't relish swimming, the parent accompanied Mrs. McPherson sometimes. In fact, her swimsuit was already in the auto, left there negligently from an outing on the previous Friday. Roberta also declined an invitation, since she felt she couldn't afford to miss the afternoon school classes. The evangelist accosted her secretary. Emma Schaeffer was glad to go.

The two women trooped to the auto with Mrs. McPherson attired in a white and yellow sport outfit. Several church members on the sidewalk were greeted and told of the destination. The evangelist carried bathing suit and cap, Bible, concordance, and papers. She intended to work on some sermons on the sand.

In the following days several witnesses turned up who claimed they saw Mrs. McPherson driving that afternoon in Los Angeles in different directions than would take her to the beach. All alleged she was wearing the Temple Uniform, a black cape and tie over a white nurse's dress. The implication was sinister. She was making a get-away! But people at the Temple remembered her sport outfit. And would she make a getaway in so conspicuous a costume as that in which multiplied thousands saw her wearing in the pulpit every week? Irene Hillstrom was one of several who later would come forward and suggest that she had been mistaken for Mrs. McPherson at one of the locales people had imagined they saw the evangelist driving. Others in Temple Uniforms that afternoon also identified themselves and their auto routes. These uniforms had a tendency to make most wearers look alike. When Mrs. McPherson wore her's to a



grand jury hearing later, even reporters who knew her well had difficulty picking her out from the group of associates similarly clad who surrounded her!

As a matter of fact, however, the evangelist could have been seen off her route to the beach - but attired in street clothes - for she got lost going out Pico Boulevard where construction caused some detours. But eventually she parked near the Ocean View Hotel at the corner of Ross Avenue and Ocean Front. She and her family had spent several days there the preceding year and the manager, Frank Langan, thereafter urged the evangelist to use his facilities for changing when she came to Ocean Park. He volunteered the use free, but Mrs. McPherson usually insisted he accept a dollar or two.

Emma and the evangelist ate a waffle apiece at a beach concession, then rented and pitched an umbrella tent. The two women worked for a while, then the evangelist entered the surf for a swim. "I really should be working on my message," she realized, so returned to the tent. She finished one sermon, then tackled some modifications for the travelogue that evening. She sent Emma to telephone the musical director and to order preparation of two new lantern slides for the presentation. "My eyes are tired," she told the secretary, "so I guess I'll have another swim while you are gone."

"All right," Emma agreed, then cautioned, "Don't go too far now." Neither woman had any idea how far the evangelist would travel before they saw each other again.

Mrs. McPherson waded knee deep into the surf, then stood watching lifeguards drill some distance away. Suddenly she heard her name called in anxious tones. "Sister McPherson! Mrs. McPherson."

"I can't even go to the beach without being recognized," flashed through her mind. She looked toward the voice and saw a man and woman. The woman sobbed, "Our baby is dying, Sister. The doctor has given it up. We've come all the way from Altadena to have you pray for the child. Please

come to our car." The pair professed that they had telephoned the Temple and been advised of the pastor's whereabouts. This had happened before. There seemed no reason for suspicion. "You will come right away, won't you?" the couple pleaded.

The woman had a dark coat draped over an arm and offered it as a wrap to the swimsuit clad minister. Then she ran ahead, protesting that she was nervous about the baby in the car. The man hurried Mrs. McPherson up Navy Street toward a parked car whose rear door stood open. Another man sat behind the steering-wheel. The motor was running. The evangelist paid no attention to those somewhat suspicious circumstances. She was concentrating on the woman sitting in the back seat cradling a blanketed bundle - supposedly the dying infant. "Just step in," the man urged - a normal request because the baby could hardly be reached from the running board. Suddenly a shove from behind pushed Mrs. McPherson into the vehicle. She was too surprised to cry out. The woman on the back seat applied something sticky and wet to the evangelist's mouth, while a firm hand clutched the back of her head. The back door slammed shut and the car lurched into motion as the victim lapsed toward unconsciousness.

Weeks later, when Mrs. McPherson related the incident, authorities expressed skepticism that an anaesthetic could have been administered so quickly and expertly under such circumstances. The evangelist replied that it happened that way even though she could not explain how. Then a blind lawyer from Long Beach, R.A. McKinley, who claimed that men purporting to be the kidnappers approached him to serve as an intermediary in collecting ransom while Mrs. McPherson still was missing, told her that these men confided they had used some kind of rubber mask to give the anaesthetic. They boasted to McKinley, "With that method you are all but unconscious with just a gasp." McKinley reported that hours later the kidnappers said they gave their

victim one-quarter grain of morphine.

We'll never know for sure whether McKinley actually had contact with the kidnappers, whether he was himself the instigator of a hoax, or the victim of one, for he died in an auto accident on the evening of August 25, 1926 and thus did not testify at the preliminary hearing. His earlier testimony before the grand jury was withheld from public scrutiny over the energetic protests of defense counsel who requested it be read into the record of the hearing, as was the testimony of Mrs. McPherson and Mrs. Kennedy. McKinley evidently talked out of both sides of his mouth, as affidavits of his acquaintances with whom he discussed the case attest. But that's a later story.

At any rate, Mrs. McPherson disappeared while Emma Schaeffer telephoned the Temple. But did any witnesses see her leave?

Chaotic testimonies contradict each other on this point. Mae Werning of El Centro, California told police and press that she was on the beach all day but never saw the evangelist enter the water. She may even have denied that Mrs. McPherson was there. After the reappearance, witnesses surfaced who professed to have seen the kidnapping. On July 8, Harry C. Swift told the press that his observation confirmed the evangelist's account. But why did he not come forward with the news at the time?

Edward Waite, a resident of the Soldiers' Home at Sawtelle, explained on October 21 why he had not come forward sooner. Waite said he rode the street car to Ocean Park after lunch, arriving at about 2 p.m. and remaining about three hours. As he hobbled on the sand, Waite glimpsed Mrs. McPherson emerging from the surf. Soon afterwards he said, "I looked again and saw her with a man about forty feet from an automobile, walking towards the automobile. I was less than fifty feet from them. I heard no words spoken. The man was a dark man, and I would recognize him as Steve any time."

"Steve" was the name Mrs. McPherson said the man gave when she woke up in captivity hours after the abduction. The woman identified herself as "Rose" and claimed to have been a nurse.

Mr. Waite described "Steve" further as "a medium-sized man, quite tall. His face appeared to be rather pock-marked." The car was "dark colored, a sedan. The engine was running. I saw her standing by the automobile for a minute with the man. I turned and looked toward the tent to see if I could see Miss Schaeffer, and when I looked again in the direction of the automobile, it and the parties were gone."

Edward Waite attached nothing sinister to what he had seen at the time, and when he heard about the drowning the next day - as he told it - "I supposed that she had walked up to the hotel, after I had seen her at the automobile, and had later gone into the water again and was drowned."

Waite told no one about his observations until October 21 because he "didn't think the story itself would be of any value because they haven't found the kidnappers." But when the morning papers that day carried a report that a lame man had been seen on the beach on May 18 using a cane and suggested that Ormiston was the lame man, "I decided it was time for my story to be known, for I was the only lame man on the beach at the time." (Quoted from signed statement in the archives at Angelus Temple.)

Meanwhile, Emma Schaeffer got nervous when Mrs. McPherson did not return to the tent. She enlisted help from lifeguards to look for the evangelist far out in the water. Eventually she phoned the Temple and confided her fears. Her beloved employer was lost in the sea.

## CHAPTER 4

# Drowned?

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Brother Arthur broke the news to Mother Kennedy. This one-time Methodist minister, perhaps the most beloved and respected staff member Angelus Temple ever had, serving from the opening of the church until his death in 1935, found Aimee Semple McPherson's mother in the parsonage adjoining the Temple. "God bless you," he stammered, then continued, "I don't know how to tell you. Sister went swimming this afternoon at twenty minutes to three and she hasn't come back yet." "Sister" was the title by which most of Mrs. McPherson's flock called her.

Mother Kennedy glanced at a clock. It was after five. J.W. Arthur communicated what news Emma Schaeffer had sobbed over the phone. Mrs. Kennedy jumped to the conclusion her daughter had drowned. It was almost ironic, for Sister had rescued her mother from the surf on that same stretch of beach the previous year.

"She is drowned," pontificated the parent, an opinion she cherished stubbornly, despite rumors and ransom notes

to the contrary, until she recognized the voice of her daughter over the telephone wire from Douglas, Arizona thirty-six days later. Once Mother Kennedy made up her mind about something, it took unprecedented contradiction to change it. So she attached no connection at this time to the fact that on Sunday morning, May 16, a prominent Los Angeles pastor reportedly told his congregation, "We are ready to put the skids under Aimee Semple McPherson and her Angelus Temple."

That night, while some Temple workers hastened to the beach to set up search headquarters to look for the body, Mrs. Kennedy ministered heroically in her daughter's place, narrating the travelogue and informing the congregation of the evangelist's "homegoing." At one point she presented Mrs. McPherson's daughter by her first husband, who had died in China. Sixteen-year old Roberta told the packed auditorium, "It is my ambition to take up Mother's work just where she left off and if possible to do as much in the service of God as she did." She solicited prayers for strength and guidance.

Sister's son by Harold McPherson, who had divorced her some years earlier, was not in Los Angeles. Rolf, who in 1944 succeeded his mother as leader of the Foursquare churches instead of Roberta, who left the work in 1937, had been staying at Winters, a Yolo County town, on the Pleasants' ranch. Roberta, by the way, is an enthusiastic rooter for her brother. "If I had stayed," she told me in 1971, "I might not have been the strong leader my brother is." At any rate, Mrs. Kennedy determined to protect her grandchildren as best she could through the ordeal. She sent Roberta to be sheltered by Mrs. David Coleman at her home on North Los Robles Avenue in Pasadena. Mrs. Coleman had designed and decorated the award-winning floats Angelus Temple had entered in several January 1 Tournament of Roses Parades in her city. She also had decorated Angelus Temple for Sister's return from her Holy Land vacation on April 24. And

when reporters descended *en mass* upon the Pleasants' ranch, she accepted Harry Hollenbeck's offer to travel to North California and bring the boy home. Hollenbeck was the builder of the Bible School Building next door to Angelus Temple, then receiving its finishing touches. He would later be mistakenly identified as accompanying the evangelist to a road house in Agua Prieta, Mexico, five days before her reappearance.

Mother Kennedy couldn't bear to go to Ocean Park until a week after the presumed drowning, but thousands of Temple people, plus the curious, thronged the sands as the sea search for the lost body continued. From the beginning the police paid lip service to the drowning theory, and the public assumed the evangelist had perished. Flavia Gaines Leitch substituted a heavy-black-bordered box enclosing the words, "To Aimee Semple McPherson. IN MEMORY," for her regular column in the Los Angeles *Examiner* for May 20 and penned an eloquent tribute to the evangelist which appeared elsewhere in the same issue.

Immediate assistance seemed required to beef up the pulpit personnel at Angelus Temple. Mrs. Kennedy wired evangelist Paul Rader - probably as famous a clergyman as anyone in America except for Billy Sunday and Mrs. McPherson. Rader had filled the Temple pulpit while Sister had gone to Palestine. But previous commitments prevented him from returning immediately. The next night, May 22nd, a church member from Pasadena interrupted the Saturday night services by jumping to his feet and hurrying down the aisle toward the platform waving his arms and shouting that he was ordained by God to take Mrs. McPherson's place. Church workers corralled the disturber and led him, shouting "Hallelujah!", outside where some police stood on duty. They told the man they would release him if he would go home. He agreed. But fifteen minutes later he created another sensation with a similar interruption. The police wanted to commit him for observation, but Temple workers prevailed

upon them to let them take him home. The man had joined the church about a year before. Mrs. Kennedy finally engaged Dr. Charles Shreve of McKendree Methodist Episcopal Church in Washington, D.C., where Mrs. McPherson had conducted great meetings, and Watson Argue from Winnepeg, Canada, to fill the pulpit.

For days the beach search continued for the body. Several alleged witnesses gave contradictory reports of seeing the evangelist virtually here, there and everywhere in the vicinity before the disappearance. There would not have been time for hardly any of the meanderings reported during the brief period of Emma Schaeffer's absence. One man announced he had seen Sister struggling in the surf and heard her calling for help. But why did he not do something about it at the time? The rumor swept the crowd that the evangelist died in an underwater struggle with a sea monster! Then a Venice woman reported seeing a whale! A reward of \$500 for the recovery of the body spurred searchers - and also rumors. Twenty-six year old Robert Browning swam to his death off Manhattan Beach attempting to reach an object which he imagined was the body. Airplanes and divers entered the effort, but all to no avail. An elderly man had to be restrained by police when he professed to see a vision of Mrs. McPherson rising from the waves and beckoning him to come to her!

On May 29 a telegram, addressed not to Minnie Kennedy or the Temple, but to Los Angeles Police Captain Herman Cline, who was heading the investigation of the disappearance, arrived from Harold McPherson of Ocala, Florida. Rolf's father wired, "Have just learned of Aimee Semple McPherson's disappearance. Was her husband, but now divorced. I was formerly in work with her and will be glad to give information or assist in any way to clear up this case. Please mail me Los Angeles papers for past week."

Two minor sensations erupted and ebbed. Eddie Barry, the hotel bell-boy at Ocean Park who procured the orange



juice and candy Emma Schaëffer carried out to give to Mrs. McPherson on the beach, disappeared the same night the evangelist was feared drowned. Hotel manager Lanagan scoffed at any connection between the two disappearances, advising that Barry had been planning to leave for some time without naming a definite date. Police, however, reacted with suspicion and commenced an investigation. District Attorney Asa Keyes announced he wanted to interrogate the bell-boy. It turned out, however, that Eddie had simply eloped to San Diego, where he was found working in the Salvation Army hotel. An analysis of the candy and orange juice Barry had provided proved both pure, so no foul play was suspected on that account.

Officials were puzzled on May 24 when a search of Mrs. McPherson's automobile turned up a black bathing suit and green bathing cap. The evangelist had worn a green swimsuit on the beach. When Mrs. Kennedy learned of the discovery she laughed that the apparel was "mine, not Sister's," and reported leaving it in the automobile on May 14th when she had accompanied her daughter to the beach. "Upon our return," she explained, "only one suit was taken from the car, the other being left in the car because it was not wet." She added, "It is not unusual to have bathing equipment" in the car. The Los Angeles *Examiner* of May 25 displayed a picture of Mother Kennedy dangling the swimsuit.

Meanwhile, the cauldron of rumors began boiling over. J.W. Buchanan, manager of the Burns Detective Agency retained by the Temple, told the church and radio audience, "The air is full of wild rumors and that is all there is to it." Newspapers reported that several thousand rumors surfaced in the first six days!

Mother Kennedy vigorously denied suggestions her daughter had committed suicide, documenting Mrs. McPherson's success in deterring hosts of others from their announced self-destructions. Sister's beliefs, insisted the parent, absolutely precluded any possibility of suicide. But the

rumors persisted. Mrs. Kennedy also scoffed at continuing speculations that financial difficulties at the Temple had led to her daughter's disappearance. A false report gained circulation that the body had been found, but the facts soon exploded that rumor. Dr. Gustave Haas, who had treated the evangelist two years previously, commented concerning rumors of amnesia, terming it "possible" and "not untenable." Dr. Haas stated, "Mrs. McPherson had a splendid physique but was undoubtedly working too hard. She was doing the work of three women, in addition to being almost constantly under the emotional and psychological strain of her type of work. We frequently find in the cases of religious enthusiasts or, in fact, enthusiasts along any line, that their zeal carries them actually past the point of physical endurance and for a time makes it possible for them to go on. But when that force snaps, as it is quite likely to do, there is no reserve strength. Merely as a theory, I should say it would have been possible for Mrs. McPherson to have gone farther down the shore than the watchers realized, to have suffered a stroke of amnesia, and to have come out of the water and wandered on down the beach, apparently in a normal condition, actually in possession of her faculties, but with her mind a blank as to whom she really was."

Dr. Haas speculated further, "In that condition, she might even have gone on to the hills below Santa Monica and perhaps found refuge in some cabin."

It didn't take long for kidnapping rumors to escalate either. The next night after the disappearance investigators scotched the first of these. Fifteen year old Vina Parrish, a former member of Angelus Temple who lived in Edendale, a district on the street-car line which ran north in front of the church, professed to have information that Sister had been kidnapped. Judge Carlos Hardy of the Los Angeles Superior Court, a confidant of the Temple leadership, passed on the information to the police. Detective Lieutenant Ackley and Policewoman Vaughn questioned the girl. But her

information was so vague that they took her to a receiving hospital for treatment for hysteria.

Meanwhile, a flood of communications poured into the Temple and police headquarters, suggesting the whereabouts of the evangelist. A mysterious telegram which gave no hint of the identity of the sender proposed, "Suggest immediate search behind locked and unlocked doors at Ocean View Hotel," the inn where Sister and Miss Schaeffer had changed into beach wear. Nothing turned up.

Mrs. Kennedy received a telegram seemingly signed "Dr. Merton" three days after the disappearance. The wire informed, "Daughter O.K. period. Do not worry period." At the grand jury hearing in July, Captain Cline complained that he had never seen this telegram, and attached sinister implications to its alleged cover-up, but Mother Kennedy chirped that the *Examiner* had published the wire on May 23, so there had been no cover-up. An effort to make "Ormiston" out of the signature proved inconclusive, and the identification of the sender was hazy.

About the time the "Dr. Merton" telegram was filed, a letter was mailed in Oakland by a woman who informed that Mrs. McPherson was in the bay city and would soon return to her congregation.

As rumors multiplied, allegations of the evangelist's whereabouts sent investigators scurrying after clues in three countries. The first report of Mrs. McPherson being seen away from the beach was filed by Detective Lieutenant M.O. Barnard, who claimed both he and his wife saw the evangelist and another woman driving past the Culver City studios of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer in the direction of Los Angeles, not the beach. He stated the time was three p.m. He stuck to his identification in spite of beach witnesses who saw Sister enter the surf after that time. Barnard declared that the evangelist was wearing her Temple uniform, a white dress under a black cape.

Mrs. Kennedy contradicted the detective, insisting that

her daughter had left the parsonage in sports clothes, taking no other additional attire than beach wear. Lu Etta Sorenson, who had witnessed the departure, signed an affidavit describing the evangelist's clothing. It corresponded exactly with the garb Emma Schaeffer had brought back from the beach. Barnard's identification was "exploded" — that is Lately Thomas' term — later when Irene Hillsbrom of the Temple announced that she was the party the police detective saw. A statement from Alice Franck, who was with Irene at the time, corroborated their route and garb. Irene Hillstrom was known for affecting a resemblance to Mrs. McPherson in hair style and dress.

Soon rumors located Sister in Denver, but communications with civic officials there scouted her presence. The Colorado authorities spoke highly of Mrs. McPherson's ministry in the city in previous years and were sure she wasn't there.

On May 22 a letter came from an unknown woman stating that Sister was being held for a huge ransom in a Santa Monica Canyon cabin. Deputy Sheriffs Walter Hunter and William Hanby joined Venice police in searching the Canyon, but found nothing to substantiate the rumor.

The same day two reports that the body had been found proved baseless. Aviator Arthur Goebel thought he sighted a corpse floating two miles off Crystal Pier. Herman Cline and other officers joined Captain E. Pritchard Smith aboard a speed-boat which rushed to the area. And Santa Monica Police Chief Webb and Identification Expert Mallory hurried north to the foot of Malibu Canyon near Inceville to investigate a body reported in the surf there. It turned out to be a dead seal.

May 22 proved a banner day for rumors. Carter B. Corder reported he saw Mrs. McPherson in person in Altadena, a town above Pasadena. She accosted him on the street there, he said, and laughed, "A great joke, isn't it?", and then hurried away. An intensive search in the area

continued well into the night. This same Saturday a private detective believed he saw the evangelist emerge from the Southern Pacific Railroad depot at Third and Townsend Streets. The woman — whoever she was — entered an auto which had no license plates. He trailed the car, driven by some man, to the California Hotel at 1390 California Street. The driver went into the hotel and came out a bit later with another woman wearing brown attire. The detective then goofed. He went into the hotel to seek to learn who the other woman was. When he returned to the street, the auto and its occupants had vanished. Kenneth Ormiston's parents resided at the time in the hotel, but there seemed no connection with this circumstance in that fact. The woman from the hotel was not Ormiston's mother. The "identification" was in San Francisco.

According to a clerk at the Pismo Beach Hotel, about ten miles south of San Luis Obispo on the Central California coast, Mrs. McPherson had registered there a few days after her disappearance, using the name of Mrs. A. Ferguson. Another woman and two men were with "Mrs. Ferguson," whom the clerk supposed was trying to avoid recognition. The clerk reported the group continued north after leaving the hotel. One wonders why, if he really recognized the evangelist, the clerk did not summon the authorities.

One week after the disappearance a flash from El Paso, Texas advised that Deputy Sheriff Boquer was investigating a report that Sister had been seen crossing the Rio Grande into Mexico there in a car with California license plates. Mexican authorities pursued a massive search which turned up nothing.

The day before, a Mrs. Catherine Neighley had a strange experience at Victoria Hall in Los Angeles, the auditorium where Mrs. McPherson preached first in the city upon her arrival on the west coast in December 1918. A drunk woman was laying on the floor creating a commotion. A man weighing about 200 pounds, according to Mrs. Neighley's

estimate, accompanied her. Mrs. Neighley gave a rather complete description of the man. He was "very dark complexioned" with "broad shoulders, black hair, combed straight back, black eyes with a peculiar look to them, and hands very rough." The man claimed he was a carpenter. Mission authorities had the man arrested as a "suspicious character," but took the woman into Brother McCullough's office where the pastor and another woman listened to the story. "Why did you come to Victoria Hall drunk?" they inquired.

"I came to tell you where Sister McPherson is," Mrs. Neighley recalled the woman's reply. "Sister McPherson is not drowned. Two men and a woman went down to the beach and took her to their car, the woman doped her, they put her in the car and took her to Watts and kept her in a hut all night." Then the kidnappers took her to Mexico to hold her for a ransom.

At the time Mrs. Neighley thought the tale was fantasy. "She would have told more, but I made her keep still at that point," she reported. Ethel Irene Cox signed as a witness to Mrs. Neighley's signed statement given after Mrs. McPherson's return.

This conversation occurred the day before the first ransom note was mailed in San Francisco. If it unfolded as sworn, this drunk may have had some connection with the authors of that "Revengers" letter. It seemed noteworthy that the "Avengers" letter that came later, demanding the same amount of ransom, boasted that the authors had been planting rumors of Mrs. McPherson's whereabouts in different places during the period they claimed to have her in captivity. Police never followed up on this tip.

Mrs. Neighley explained why she did not advise Mother Kennedy of the conversation. She recalled that the man accompanying the drunk woman admitted he had been dopping her for immoral purposes and keeping her in his home, concluding, "Knowing that should the newspapers

get this report, which involved characters from the underworld, they would magnify it and we did not feel it wise nor fair to Sister McPherson's mother, children, and loved ones who mourned her as dead at this time to have this story appear. We therefore withheld the facts until we knew Sister McPherson was alive and felt there may be significance in the woman's story."

Herman Cline hurried north to San Francisco after a Mrs. Francis B. Marshall, of the Wayfarers Pentecostal Mission there, reported she saw Mrs. McPherson in an auto on Market Street with several other persons. She called out to Sister, but the car sped away. The next day she got a mysterious phone call from a man who dictated a statement to be given to the newspapers in order "to stop ridiculous rumors." The message informed that Sister was not dead, nor kidnapped, nor sick. "There is a reason for her remaining in seclusion which must not be known now." The voice, which Mrs. Marshall thought she recognized as belonging to one of the highest ranking Temple officials whom she would not, however, name, protested, "She has a right to live her own life in privacy. She will return to Angelus Temple about June 16th with reasons for her actions." Mrs. Marshall refused to tell more to Cline, but stubbornly insisted she had seen the evangelist.

Meanwhile, the Sacramento *Union* newspaper was getting into the act. This was perhaps the first paper outrightly to state disbelief in the drowning. On May 28 the *Union* claimed confidential information assuring that Sister was not dead: "Information was received yesterday that an automobile belonging to a man under suspicion of being implicated in the mysterious disappearance was found and identified at a point in the Valley. From the inception of the search for the body of Mrs. McPherson, the press of the state and local authorities have been dubious about the drowning of the pastor."

Yet in Los Angeles County, both District Attorney Keyes

and Police Captain Cline were being quoted as confident that the drowning story explained the disappearance.

The Sacramento *Union* wired Los Angeles' Sheriff Traeger, soliciting a request from him to the Yolo County Sheriff that a search be carried out for the evangelist on the ranch at Winters, owned by James Pleasants and his brother Ansel. Evidently the paper expected Mrs. McPherson would be found there. However, Los Angeles authorities decided the evidence was insufficient to justify such a search and notified the Sacramento newspaper that they were convinced the evangelist had drowned at sea. Rolf would be the only McPherson found then at the Pleasants' ranch.

Another Sacramento "clue" reported that on Friday, May 28th, three women at a Sacramento hotel fled from a detective hunting for Sister. The group were registered as Mrs. L.P. Benson of Los Angeles, Mrs. Simpson of Los Angeles, and Mr. and Mrs. R.L. McElena of Los Angeles, although the last name of the couple was so badly scrawled it could have been something else. The next day a phone call came to the hotel asking for three different names. The manager said those parties had never registered at the Regis Hotel. The caller then described the women he sought. The manager recognized their description as fitting Benson, Simpson, and McElenas, but advised they had left. Alfred Gropp heard the caller protest, "I must get in touch with the three women. It's a matter of life and death. Tell them to call Capital 1332-W as soon as they appear."

Capital 1332-W turned out to be the phone number of William Yeomans, a former organist and business agent for Mrs. McPherson, who now worked as a sewing machine salesman in the Sacramento Valley. Yeomans denied flatly that he had anything to do with the telephone call, but confided, "I believe Mrs. McPherson was kidnapped," a statement he made over and over again when quizzed about the incident.

A desk clerk at a hotel at Jacomba in the San Diego



mountains "recognized" Mrs. McPherson as occupying a room there on May 29 or 30, according to an unsigned letter which reached the Temple authorities considerably later. The desk clerk told a guest who occupied the same room several days afterwards that the evangelist was with one woman and two men but was "so doped she did not know anyone." The letter stated, "The men rented the cabin but forgot the linen so the clerk went there to give them the linen and he saw this woman sitting in chair. He spoke to her but she did not even move her eyes. When the clerk got back to hotel desk he started to think about it and then recognized her as Mrs. McPherson, but could not investigate until 4 a.m., but when he got to their cabin they had already departed." Again, why didn't the clerk alert the authorities?

On June 2nd a policeman discovered, on a street, a note scribbled apparently in a woman's handwriting. Presumably someone had thrown it out of a moving auto. The note read, "Help! They took me to cabin in Bouquet." Officers assumed this meant Bouquet Canyon about forty miles northeast of Los Angeles, above the town of Saugus. They did find a cabin which showed signs of residence. One of the two slightly mussed beds displayed a pink crepe de Chine nightie. But there was nothing to connect the place or the gown with the evangelist.

On June 5th word came to the Temple that "Inspector Middleton of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police" had located Mrs. McPherson in Edmonton, Alberta. Mrs. Kennedy enlisted Zelma Argue of that Canadian city, the brother of Watson Argue who was helping fill the Temple pulpit, to investigate. The identification turned out to be another farce of mistaken identity. Zelma Argue talked to the woman involved and knew she was not the evangelist.

June 11 was the date a woman was found wandering in El Centro. Police Chief Sterling Oswalt later would "partially identify" Mrs. McPherson as being that woman, but his opinion was not released until after her reappearance.

The next day, assistant editor Gray of the San Francisco *Examiner* sought the help of Mrs. Mabel Isenberger of San Jose to identify a lady in the Bay City whom he suspected was the evangelist. Gray showed Mrs. Isenberger the woman's handwriting and stated it had nine points like Mrs. McPherson's. "I'm willing to bank my reputation of twenty years (in newspaper work) that this is Mrs. McPherson's handwriting."

Gray and Isenberger went to this woman's apartment. She had glasses on when she admitted the visitors and gave her name as Mrs. Macdonald. Mrs. Isenberger asked her to remove her glasses, and she did. The woman denied Gray's suggestions that she was the evangelist, and Mrs. Isenberger knew she was not. Later she accompanied Gray to the homes of some friends who also denied she was Mrs. McPherson. The woman — who admitted that Macdonald was an alias — confided to the *Examiner* editor that her husband was involved in narcotics traffic and that she was in hiding for her life. She expressed the belief that Mrs. McPherson had been kidnapped. Mrs. Isenberger gave this information in an affidavit, which included a copy of a long letter from Gray, sworn before Notary Public F.M. Spinning, on July 14th.

In mid-June a report came from Coos Bay, Oregon that a badly-decomposed body had washed ashore nearby. Officials there suspected it might be Mrs. McPherson and sent an inquiry concerning the fillings in her teeth. Mrs. Kennedy averred her daughter had no fillings in her teeth. The Coos Bay corpse did, so that ended that. Mother Kennedy also scoffed at the idea that a body could be carried almost a thousand miles north.

Two sightings of Mrs. McPherson were supposed to have been made on June 18, one at a Lowell, Arizona hotel, and the other at a road house in Agua Prieta, Mexico.

So the rumors persisted. On one day the evangelist was reported seen at sixteen different places at once. Fifteen

obviously were impossible, and possibly all sixteen were false. One which may have been authentic, however, was reported by Sheriff Homer M. Tate of Graham County, Arizona. The one problem concerning this identification is the long delay in reporting it. Sheriff Tate did not write to Mrs. McPherson from Safford, Arizona until December 24, 1926.

Here is what the Sheriff said: "Some few days before your appearance in Douglas, Arizona, I happened to be in Bonita, Arizona on official business, when an automobile bearing a California license drove up and inquired the road to Douglas. There was a man driving, and a woman in the back seat was holding on her lap another woman that seemed to be sick. The sick woman was lying on a pillow on the other woman's lap. There is also another man here that saw them and talked to them." Sheriff Tate located Bonita as "a little country Post Office located in Southern Graham County on the highway." He offered to investigate further and secure this evidence for the expected Superior Court trial. However, the case never got to court, so the Sheriff's letter was buried in the copious files at Angelus Temple, and never received any publicity that I know of. The Sheriff declared he had said nothing to anyone about this incident, other than the man who could confirm his observation, and requested the matter be kept confidential until the evidence was offered in court. Evidently Tate hadn't expected the evangelist to be bound over for trial, for he stated, "(I) didn't really think you needed more evidence than you had, but the way it appears now you might need help of this kind." Mrs. McPherson and her attorneys did claim they had considerable new evidence, confirming her story, ready to present to a jury, but they never got the chance.

Because of the rash of rumors, and not because she believed anything could materialize, Mrs. Kennedy offered a \$25,000.00 reward for the return of Aimee Semple McPherson alive. Mother announced the reward "as a challenge to the sincerity of the publication of various

rumors." Captain Cline kept urging the withdrawal of the offer, insisting it could only multiply the number of sightings. Mrs. Kennedy was willing to yield on Friday, June 4, "but owing to the wild reports arriving in this city from all parts of the world" (only a few of which are here reported) she decided to continue the offer until midnight, Saturday, June 12. Some wiseacres had greeted the initial report of the withdrawal to the unwillingness of the Temple to risk its money! Cline wasn't happy with the week's extension. And it did have the effect he expected. Yet in later years the withdrawal of the reward was cited by skeptics of Mrs. McPherson's story as evidence that Mother Kennedy knew her daughter was in hiding. Had Mrs. Kennedy had her way, the offer would have continued indefinitely, for she was certain her daughter was dead and insisted stubbornly on this point right up to the reappearance.

## CHAPTER 5

# Rumors

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About one week after Aimee Semple McPherson disappeared, the Los Angeles *Times* insinuated the name of Kenneth G. Ormiston into the mystery. Reporters dug up the story that at about the time the evangelist left for the Holy Land, Ormiston's wife Ruth filed a missing person's report concerning her husband. The newspaper erroneously reported that Ormiston disappeared from his Temple job as radio engineer about the time Mrs. McPherson sailed. He had taken other assignments almost two weeks before that January 11th date. Nevertheless, the story spread that Ormiston had traveled abroad with the evangelist. He didn't.

Near the end of January, Emma Schaeffer heard that a Hollywood gossip magazine planned to print an article charging that Mrs. McPherson was indeed traveling in Europe with Ormiston. Mrs. Kennedy immediately wired the Thomas Cook Travel Agency, in charge of her daughter's tour, requesting that they send a guard with Sister to scotch any such rumors. The travel agency complied. Meanwhile,

the mother got word to Mrs. McPherson, who hurried back to Ireland where she had left daughter Roberta with her paternal grandparents. Thereafter, Roberta accompanied her mother in her travels, as an additional safeguard against innuendo. The gossip magazine never published the article.

Meanwhile, Ormiston's meanderings on the West Coast during Mrs. McPherson's absence abroad came to be rather thoroughly documented. He had been using aliases for some time, he would later admit to police, because of his estrangement with his wife, who by this time had sailed back to Australia after reneging on threats to divorce him. And Ormiston traveled with female company. On February 20, 1926 he registered with a woman in a Venice Hotel, as "James Wallace and wife of Glendale." Could this have been the notorious "Miss X" of the Carmel cottage three months later? Ormiston admitted he used the alias "James Wallace" "a lot." It probably was only a coincidence that this was the name of Mrs. McPherson's long deceased half-brother, though some tried to make something of the matter. Whoever Ormiston's companion was on February 20, it could not have been the evangelist who was then overseas. She did not return until April 24.

Ormiston turned up in Seattle on March 15, where he purchased a blue Chrysler automobile which would figure famously in the subsequent rumors. He registered this vehicle under his own name, disdaining aliases like George McIntire, H.C. Cornell, Frank Gibson, Ralph Stringer, he had used or would use in addition to his favorite, James Wallace. How many other pseudonyms the radio man whelped will never be known.

Apparently he registered under his own name at the Waldorf Hotel in Venice on March 26, where he stayed until April 9. In checking out he announced he was returning to Seattle.

When the *Times* dragged Ormiston into the disappearance mystery, District Attorney Keyes hesitated to

follow up the suggestion. He finally yielded to pressure because, as Lately Thomas put it, "Newspaper good will is important to an office holder" (p. 30, "Vanishing Evangelist"). On May 26th Keyes announced he wanted to question the radio man. The next day Kenneth Ormiston showed up at headquarters, explaining he'd read the evening before in San Francisco newspapers that he was wanted and immediately caught the train south to Los Angeles to comply. He telephoned Mother Kennedy and later was welcomed by her at the beach search headquarters. He told reporters there that the connection of his name with the evangelist was "a gross insult to a noble and sincere woman." He denounced as erroneous reports and rumors that he had gone into hiding. And there he was, big as life.

Ormiston convinced police officials that he knew nothing about the disappearance of the evangelist. And Mrs. Kennedy issued a statement, carried in the *Evening Express* the same day, vigorously denying that her daughter and the radio man had ever been overfriendly. The mother protested, "Aimee led a spotless and blameless life, and all reports to the contrary are absurd and simply attempt to besmirch her reputation. My daughter was perfectly free to form any associations she wished as far as the law was concerned, but she did not have the desire. Her entire life was consecrated to her work in the Temple and the thought of any (romantic) associations such as insinuated were farthest from her thoughts."

In "The Vanishing Evangelist" Lately Thomas reflects Mother Kennedy's attitude as expressed above. However, in "Storming Heaven" he pictures her as resenting alleged associations between her daughter and Ormiston. The earlier book represents the real facts. The evangelist was much too busy to have time to visit the radio room, as "Storming Heaven" alleges. Her schedule was a killer. Mrs. Kennedy did, in fact, make derogatory remarks about her daughter after their rift in 1927, but she changed her tune

when she returned to the Temple management briefly a few years later. It is absolute fact that the evangelist and radio engineer had only business contacts during his employment at the Temple.

Ormiston, before entraining north, gave police a rather detailed description of his movements since May 18, volunteering that on the 19th or 20th he appeared in Salinas to pay a traffic fine, but evidently he made no mention of his residence in Carmel-by-the-Sea. He explained his troubles with his wife developed from incompatibility of temperament and admitted she had been "insanely jealous," even of Mrs. McPherson, "without reason," Ormiston insisted.

The *Times*, however, seemed determined to keep his name in the case, whether because of "tips" or investigations or more sinister reasons. Somehow the *Times* got wind that Ormiston was driving south from the Bay Area with a woman on May 29th. The pair did in fact register at 6:15 a.m. at the Andrews Hotel in San Luis Obispo. Presumably the couple had driven all night from possibly Salinas. They signed in as "Mr. and Mrs. Frank Gibson." The "Gibsons" checked out about 5:15 p.m. and headed south. Meanwhile, the *Times* phoned Marshall Selover, City Editor of the Santa Barbara *Morning Press* who acted as that city's correspondent for the Los Angeles newspaper. The *Times* requested Selover to get a police officer or highway patrolman and intercept Ormiston's Chrysler on the highway in order to identify the occupants.

Probably Marshall Selover ever thereafter kicked himself that he turned over the assignment to reporter Wallace Moore. At the time the City Editor thought it a strategic move, since he was committed to other work and Moore could identify Mrs. McPherson, if the woman were indeed her, because he had covered her meetings in other cities.

Wallace Moore missed a golden opportunity to become a journalistic hero. Here was the chance of a lifetime for a



scoop. He could either apprehend a fugitive or squelch raw rumors on this Saturday when Mrs. McPherson had been "seen" also in San Francisco and Sacramento, both too many hours away to have reached Santa Barbara.

For some reason Moore did not pick up a policeman. He parked alone, a bit after 8:30 p.m., on Modoc Road, which joins the Coast Highway about three-and-one-half miles north of the then city limits of Santa Barbara. Just before 11 p.m. Ormiston's Chrysler sped past. Moore recognized the license number, F-31052, and noted that a woman sat beside the man driver.

Moore tailed the Chrysler for some distance before he managed to pull it over at Bath and Pedrogosa Streets inside the city limits. He talked to "Frank Gibson" whom he was sure was Ormiston and studied the woman beside the driver, from whom he could not elicit a single word. "Gibson" volunteered that the pair were traveling to Los Angeles' Alexandria Hotel.

Moore mentioned the reason for stopping the car as rumors that the woman was Mrs. McPherson. He told Ormiston finally that he realized the woman was not the evangelist, and let the couple go.

That was Moore's second mistake. His first was not getting an officer to accompany him on the quest. An officer could have insisted on seeing identification, indeed could have hailed the couple to headquarters. People are detained "on suspicion" for far less. Moore's second mistake was letting the couple get away, especially since he saw the driver careen down Bath Street and double back to the north. An ambitious newsman, you would think, would have tailed the Chrysler, or at least tried.

About the only explanation which could justify the reporter's neglect would be the circumstance that he was absolutely convinced the woman was someone other than the evangelist. Then the apparent flight would seem attributable to Ormiston's desire not to have whoever else she might have been identified.

Wallace Moore went back to the Santa Barbara *Morning Press* after the encounter and reported his conclusion that the woman was not Aimee Semple McPherson. The newspaper carried the story in its morning edition, informing, "The woman did not resemble Mrs. McPherson except in general build."

Ormiston's car was not noticed again until December, when it was discovered on the sixth of that month in plain sight in an Oakland, California garage. Hundreds of people had seen the vehicle in the interim but never noticed the license number F-31052, which had been broadcast to all parts of the United States once the search for Ormiston got underway in earnest when the Carmel confoundings erupted.

Minnie Kennedy snorted when she read a scribbled communication. "Mother, darling," the note signed with her daughter's name exhorted, "pay the money." As if she couldn't detect a forgery of Sister's handwriting! She showed the missive to reporters and registered her disgust.

A ransom letter indeed had arrived at Angelus Temple. Someone mailed it in San Francisco on May 25. Minnie Kennedy scoffed at it as a fraud. Dated May 24, the missive addressed to Angelus Temple demanded \$500,000 in currency to be paid at once for the return of the evangelist who, the letter charged, had injured the senders and consequently must pay in money or in blood. The communication directed that a Temple representative, wearing a badge on the lapel of his coat, bring the money and take a seat on Saturday (May 29) in the lobby of the Palace Hotel in San Francisco. One of the kidnappers would then approach the representative and tell him what to do. The note purportedly advised, "Get busy at once. We mean business. Saturday at 11 o'clock," and was signed, "Revengers." I say "purportedly" because when a newspaper later printed what it represented to be the "Revengers" letter, Mother Kennedy doubted that it was the original, indeed, suspected it was a facsimile. She charged that the published photostat was in

quite legible handwriting, while the original letter she received had been difficult to decipher.

No one could dispute Mrs. Kennedy on the matter because the original note was nowhere to be found. Mother turned it over to Los Angeles Police Detective Herman Cline, insisting that it was a fraud. Later the letter was discovered to have disappeared from the locked secret files of the police detective bureau! Whodunit? Nobody even offered a guess! This wasn't by any means the only hanky-panky involving police and the district attorney's office in the case!

Captain Cline agreed with Minnie Kennedy that the "Revengers" letter likely represented a hoax. But he didn't take any chances. He communicated details to the San Francisco police when Mother refused to send a Temple representative to the Palace Hotel. The San Francisco police ran in a ringer — rather two ringers, both beribboned with Temple badges. The men took seats in the hotel lobby sometime before the hour specified. But no one attempted to make contact. Cline sighed that the kidnapping theory might now de-escalate. But it didn't.

A blind Long Beach attorney, R.A. McKinley, startled the Southland with the claim that two men claiming to be the kidnappers of Aimee Semple McPherson contacted him at about 9 a.m. on Monday, May 31, the legal Memorial Day holiday or Decoration Day as it was usually called then, since May 30 fell on Sunday in 1926. The men gave the names of Wilson and Miller and said they accosted McKinley, a cousin of William McKinley, the twenty-fifth President of the United States, because he would not be able to identify them. They knew his habit of working alone in the office on holidays and said they watched him leave his home that morning in a taxicab. They ascertained that his secretary was not present before confiding to the lawyer.

The details which follow differ somewhat from those given by Lately Thomas in "The Vanishing Evangelist," though no major contradiction appears. Primary source for

the information is the sworn testimony by Long Beach Police Detective Captain J.A. Worley and Lieutenant Ralph L. Alyea, as recorded in Volume 39 of the transcript of the preliminary hearing. Both officers testified as defense witnesses.

When Wilson and Miller left, McKinley telephoned the police. The two men told him he could and expected he would. Worley and Alyea hurried over to the Pacific Southwest Bank Building where the blind attorney occupied an office on the second floor. McKinley shook hands with Worley who asked the lawyer, "Do you know Lieutenant Alyea?" McKinley said that he did, then shook hands with the lieutenant and asked the officers to be seated. Then the attorney said, "Captain Worley, you know I get more information from the underworld than any man in Long Beach." Worley conceded that point. McKinley proceeded, "I had a funny experience a few minutes before I called you. I had just arrived at my office when there was a rap at the door. I opened the door and two men came in who introduced themselves as Miller and Wilson. Mr. Miller did the talking."

The attorney had listened carefully to his visitors and reported that Miller "had a hesitation in his voice, as though he stuttered at something." He had trouble in starting off, but after stammering a bit he would get going.

McKinley quoted Miller as claiming, "We have Aimee McPherson. We have her bound and gagged. She cannot get away. No one can get to her." He asked the lawyer to contact Angelus Temple and extort \$25,000 — the amount of the reward still being offered. McKinley's fee for services would be \$5,000, Miller offered. He continued, "If you assure us that you have the \$25,000, you will hear from us Wednesday, and we will liberate Mrs. McPherson on the street at 8 o'clock Wednesday night."

McKinley told the detectives he protested to the visitors, "I don't like to have anything to do with a case of this kind. It would not look very good, me being an attorney and entering into a kidnapping plot." His visitors likely laughed up their

sleeves at that profession, for the underworld used McKinley for unsavory cases, including many involving bootlegging.

Miller warned McKinley to do exactly as directed. Four times, he said, the professed kidnapper cautioned, "If you try to trick us or double-cross us or catch us, your life isn't worth a damn."

Alyea pressed, "Do you think Mrs. McPherson is really alive? Everyone in the country thinks she was drowned. The papers are all full of it."

"I know she is alive," the lawyer responded.

"How do you know that?" Alyea asked.

"Well, there are certain things happened that I will not tell you, that I cannot tell you, and I will not tell you, but now you know the story just what happened," the lawyer evaded.

The two detectives left McKinley's office and walked down the stairway, but found the gate closed and locked. They climbed back to the second floor and took the elevator down. Worley asked the elevator operator if he recalled taking two men up in the elevator that morning. The boy tried to be cagey, but after some hesitation admitted he did. First, he asked Worley, "Did one have on a gray suit and a gray hat?" "Yes," answered the detective, though how he could have confirmed the man's dress is questionable since McKinley, being blind, could not have described it. The operator then declared that one man was taller than the other. "Do you know what floor you left them off at?" Worley wondered. The boy informed, "The second floor." "Who were they?" Worley pressed. The operator responded, "I don't know, I never saw them before. They were strangers to me." He added that he had not brought them down, that the other elevator operator must have done so.

The next morning (Tuesday, June 1) McKinley, Worley, and Alyea told their story in Los Angeles to District Attorney Keyes and Captain Cline. The police captain blurted, "I will catch these men. We can set a trap and catch them!" McKinley raised the roof. "No, no," he protested. "At my

instigation you will never get any trap and attempt to catch any kidnappers. My life has been threatened by these men, and I am blind and have no protection. I am not afraid of any man, but I do not have my eyesight. They could bump me off at any time. You will not enter into any trickery with me in catching any kidnappers."

Herman Cline dismissed the approach by the men as a hoax. "There is nothing to it," he insisted. "Her body is in the ocean."

Alyea contradicted, "Don't you think this story is at least worth investigating? It would be a terrible thing not to investigate and try to apprehend the criminals and get her away from them."

Cline remained adamant. "There is nothing to it," he repeated.

A bit later District Attorney Keyes told the Long Beach visitors to go ahead as they thought best. If the Temple would put up the \$25,000 and secure Mrs. McPherson's release through the blind attorney, it was all right with him.

"The Temple will never put up the money," Cline protested. Keyes reflected then that the matter should be investigated. He told Cline that, but the officer persisted, "There is nothing to it. I am positive of that."

Worley told Cline that he had heard Mrs. McPherson had been kidnapped once before. Cline fumed, "She never was, and is not kidnapped at the present time. Her body is over in the ocean."

The testimony is conflicting as to who made the suggestion which the authorities followed. Bernice Morris swore it was McKinley, but she was not present at the time. Alyea attributed it to Captain Worley. The suggestion was that Mrs. Kennedy could send a message via the blind lawyer to Mrs. McPherson, and if Miller and Wilson could bring back the right answers to questions submitted which only the evangelist could know, then they could determine whether or not she was alive.

Cline didn't know whether Mrs. Kennedy would cooperate. She was more certain than he that her daughter had drowned. But Cline agreed to put through a phone call to the Temple.

An apparent conflict in the testimony here concerns chronology. Worley seemed to contradict himself in the preliminary hearing, indicating that Mother Kennedy appeared at his office on Monday, May 31, at 4 p.m. with a list of four questions to be forwarded through McKinley. Worley made a notation on the bottom of the list of questions, "Mrs. Kennedy and Mr. Guthrie called at my office on May 31st 4 p.m. 1926" (sic). But it was not until the next day that Cline phoned for the questions. Further testimony by Worley, and also by Alyea, suggests the officers went out to the Temple on Tuesday afternoon and picked up the questions from Mother Kennedy, who did not believe anything would come of the project, but professed she would do anything to squelch the avalanche of "wicked rumors."

The questions, as read into the preliminary hearing transcript on page 3194, were: "1. Describe hammock at home in Canada and where it was. 2. Describe my dog at home on farm and give name. 3. Describe dining room stove at home. 4. Who was Wallace at our house?"

The Long Beach detectives made copies of Mrs. McPherson's mother's penciled queries, kept the original, and gave copies to McKinley and Keyes.

In the meantime, McKinley's "eyes" — his young secretary, Bernice Morris — had been advised of the intrigue. The excitement exhilarated her. She urged her boss to permit her to deliver in person, to Mrs. Kennedy, any replies the kidnappers might bring back.

From that date on McKinley would wait alone in his office every night until Mrs. McPherson's reappearance, in order to give Wilson and Miller opportunity to approach him furtively.

The kidnappers did not keep their appointed rendezvous with McKinley, and Mrs. McPherson was not liberated on the

street at 8 o'clock on Wednesday night. Here "The Vanishing Evangelist" disagrees with Alyea's testimony. The kidnappers did not get the questions from the blind lawyer in his office "late that night, between 10 and 10:30 o'clock" (op. cit., p.44), but rather at an encounter on Thursday night on a street outside the restaurant where McKinley had taken dinner. The lawyer recognized a voice which called, "Mack." Miller asked, "Did you get the money?" "No," the attorney admitted. "Why the hell haven't you got it?" Miller snorted. "I can get the money," McKinley professed. Miller then pressed, "Why haven't you got it if you can get it?"

McKinley fished a piece of paper out of his pocket and announced, "If you can answer these questions I can get the money." He asked Miller to read the questions. The men had to walk down the sidewalk to find sufficient light. It turned out that Wilson was there too. The men conferred and one (McKinley didn't state who) protested, "Well, Jesus Christ, it would be Monday night before we could get an answer. That's the best we could do."

The lawyer summoned Ralph Alyea to his office the next morning and related the encounter. The Long Beach Police Lieutenant asked if Wilson and Miller had contacted him by phone since the initial meeting Monday. Probably this was a question to test the lawyer's good faith, for Alyea already knew the answer. McKinley's phone had been bugged by the police. There had been no calls.

On Saturday, however, a call did come. McKinley told Judge Carlos Hardy of the Superior Court — a confidant of the Temple leadership who would shortly have detectives commence to tail the blind attorney — that within an hour from the time the newspapers were on the streets in Long Beach reporting that Mrs. McPherson had been found in Edmonton, Canada, Miller phoned and said, "Don't be concerned, McKinley, about the newspapers. It is a lie. We have got her."

The professed kidnappers did not show up with the

answers to the four questions on Monday. But two of the questions were answered in a ransom letter signed "Avengers" which a postman delivered to Angelus Temple on Saturday, June 19. Feverish preparations were then under way for an elaborate Memorial Service for Mrs. McPherson on the following day, and Temple officials swore the letter was not opened until Monday or Tuesday following.

By this time the Los Angeles authorities professed to be convinced the evangelist had drowned. They had investigated all other theories and found the rumors groundless. District Attorney Keyes and Captain Cline came out with a statement that they believed Sister to be dead. Cline evaluated the other alternatives, including kidnapping, and dismissed them as without merit. After these conclusions by County officials, the Temple proceeded to conduct a Memorial Service.

The press would subsequently report that a huge collection was raised on June 20 for a monument to Mrs. McPherson. Newspapers stated the figure as upwards of \$40,000 and implied that much cash came in. Actually, only about one-tenth of that amount of cash came in, but pledges from the several departments of the church promised future payment of about \$29,000. However, this was not for a monument. The money was to finish the Bible School building next door to the Temple. In the Memorial Service there was no high-pressure plea for contributions from the congregation. The pledges had been received previously from personnel in the several departments, like the Sunday School, City Sisters Office, Bible School, radio and other departments. A representative from each announced his group's goal.

Considerable criticism lashed the Temple because the Memorial Service was conducted the day after the "Avengers" ransom letter arrived. Much ado followed discovery that the special delivery stamp had disappeared off the envelope. Mrs. Kennedy claimed the stamp was gone

when she first saw the missive. She suspected that someone in the office where mail was received wanted it for a stamp collection and helped himself. At any rate, Mother swore that she did not know about the letter until a day or two after the Memorial Service. She protested, moreover, "If I had received this letter on Saturday it would have made no difference in our plans. I had the firmest conviction that my daughter was gone to the other world and we would have gone right ahead" with the Memorial Service.

Because — on the prosecution theory — Mrs. Kennedy was accused of conspiring with her daughter, Ormiston, and others to fabricate a tale of a fake disappearance, here might be a good place to insert testimony from those associated with Mother during the period Mrs. McPherson was gone.

Churchilla Bartling signed a statement reporting her observation. This graduate nurse asserted, "I have naturally been with many people who have lost their loved ones and therefore feel that I am a fairly good judge as to how average persons react to the deaths of their nearest and dearest."

Churchilla, who had known Sister and Mother for five years, reported, "The first time I saw Mother Kennedy after Mrs. McPherson was reported lost was on Wednesday evening, May 19, after the service. Mother was down among the audience shaking hands with the people, not seeming to know just what she was doing, and the tears were streaming down her face. I took her by the hand and said, "Mother, I think we had better go up to the house now."

As the nurse helped Minnie Kennedy up the rampart she realized that the Mother really didn't realize who was assisting her. "She seemed dazed and she sighed deep sighs as she walked. She was very pale and looked as if she had not slept."

The next morning Churchill Bartling came to the parsonage and learned that neither Mother nor Emma Schaeffer had eaten anything since Tuesday afternoon when Sister vanished. Churchill managed to get Emma to have



some tea and toast, but "Mother ate nothing."

Mrs. Bartling revealed that the Temple's official board felt no one but Mrs. Kennedy could handle the Temple services for the next few days after May 18 and persuaded her against her will to take Sister's place in the regular schedule of meetings. "This was very difficult for her to do, but Mother felt that she was a soldier of the cross and that it was her duty to do as she believed God and Sister would have her do." Her Salvation Army training served her well in this ordeal.

A week after the presumed drowning, Churchill reported Mrs. Kennedy's appearance when she came for the first time to the beach patrol headquarters at Ocean Park. "Her face was gray and she showed her lack of sleep and food. She appeared to have lost at least ten pounds and her breath was foul as a person's always is when suffering from sickness or deep sorrow and not eating properly." Not until the second Thursday or Friday (Churchilla couldn't be sure which day) after the disappearance could the nurse persuade Mother to take her first real meal.

The beach patrol had devised a signal for the airplanes overhead in case they spotted the body of Mrs. McPherson. A plane was to fly in and circle the shore three times. Churchill Bartling was there when an aircraft commenced the signal. To her dismay Mrs. Kennedy arrived then, "Just in time to see it." Mother asked, "Isn't that the signal?" Churchill tried to convince Mother that it was probably a mistake, which it did turn out to be. But Mother would not be misled. She recognized the signal and "broke down and cried heartbreakingly." She paced and wrung her hands and wept, sobbing, "Oh, my God, my God, I can't stand that I can't stand that!"

The object the airplane sighted, on closer examination, turned out to be a floating log.

Mrs. Bartling recalled, "Each time Mother came down to the beach she looked paler, thinner, and the lines were more

deeply sunk in her face."

Mrs. Bartling gives a somewhat different account of Mrs. Kennedy's reaction to the report of the badly decomposed body which washed ashore in mid-June at Coos Bay, Oregon. Lately Thomas and the press imply she rejected the possibility from the first that it was her daughter. But Churchill insisted it shook up Mother. She was "so completely broken up over this that she was forced to go to bed. Mother couldn't stand to think of Sister's body being decomposed and didn't feel that she could stand the shock of finding the body decomposed and in the condition it naturally would be in after being in the water for so long a time." The nurse concluded, "As time went on and the body was not found and we were forced to give up practically all hope of ever finding it, mother continued to fail in strength and we began to fear that she would eventually collapse." The only thing which kept her from collapsing, Churchill assessed, was her determination to carry on the Temple work.

But by the afternoon of Tuesday, June 22nd, Mrs. Kennedy feared she was nearer the breaking point. At a meeting of Temple workers in the Council Chamber at 1:30 p.m., just preceding the 2:30 Divine Healing Service, she confided that she felt most keenly the weight of the burden which had been laid on her shoulders since Mrs. McPherson had been taken away, a load which threatened to increase because Dr. Shreve had to leave shortly. "If ever I needed prayer," she said, "I need it now. Pray for me that the Lord will give me strength. I find my burdens becoming heavier each day instead of lighter as I hoped they would be after the Memorial Services."

Mrs. Kennedy then told the workers, several of whom signed a statement later describing the proceedings, that she had received another letter from the purported kidnappers of Sister McPherson in which they had enclosed a lock of hair supposed to be her daughter's and stated they would cut off the finger with the scar and send it to prove that Sister was

actually alive and that they had her in captivity.

For some reason the statement concludes, "On this afternoon when Mother Kennedy came and told us of having received this ("Avengers") letter, Mrs. Lillian Martin was not in the room. Neither was she in the council room meeting that day at all."

The Temple workers gathered around Minnie Kennedy and prayed for God to give her strength.

The next day Mother had a better answer to prayer than that. She got her daughter back alive.

## CHAPTER 6

# Captivity

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On the day after Aimee Semple McPherson's reappearance monopolized newspaper front pages, friends of Santa Barbara astrologer J.H. Kennedy (no relation to Minnie) crowed that the local authority had called the turn in the McPherson case.

It seems Kennedy had cast a horoscope for the evangelist on the morning of June 4th, twenty days earlier. On the basis of the horoscope the astrologer asserted, according to the *Los Angeles Evening Express*, "that the Los Angeles evangelist was not dead and that she was held a prisoner and would be returned to her home inside of three months." The Associated Press dispatch quoted Kennedy as stating that Sister was either "dazed or under the influence of dope," and that she was a prisoner of someone who used dope or was connected with a dope ring. Kennedy added that when she returned "she will have some stories to tell of her experiences that will rival or surpass the wildest imaginative fiction."

Did the "stars" make a lucky guess? At any rate, Sister came home three weeks — not three months — after the alleged "revelation."

On Friday, June 18, someone mailed the "Avengers" ransom letter on a train between El Paso, Texas and Tucson, Arizona. The post office did faster deliveries in 1926 than it does now, for the missive was delivered at Angelus Temple the very next day. The inexpertly typewritten letter, addressed to Minnie Kennedy, struck Mother as a phony when she read it for the first time at the beginning of the following week — whether on Monday or Tuesday never was absolutely established. The volume of mail deluging Angelus Temple prevented speedy reading of all the letters.

Mrs. Kennedy glared at the length, two-paged message:

"Exactly one month has elapsed since we grabbed Aimee McPherson and now is the time for action. We nearly bungled it once, but we've moved her to a safe place now and have doped out a plan of ransom payment that is absolutely safe to us. You won't be able to trap us if you act in bad faith. We doubt if you will attempt any funny business though when you are convinced this is no hoax or Sunday School picnic and that we really have your daughter. Do what you like with this letter (we realize you got to use it to raise the dough) but the next one must be kept absolutely to yourself and its instructions followed exactly or there will be grave consequences to your daughter.

"First, in order that you may know without doubt that Aimee is alive and in our hands, we are enclosing a lock of her hair. We tried to get answers to your silly questions but because she knows about the half million ransom she won't answer them. Says she would rather die than cripple the church to such an extent. But before she knew what it was all about we tricked her into a couple fool answers something like, 'A woven wire between two apple trees, and the

hound was black and named Gyp.' She shut up then realizing what we were after but if you insist a lighted cigar against a bare foot often gets results. Her middle right hand finger has a scar on it you ought to recognize, suppose we chop it off and send it along to kill your doubts? We've got her alright and trust by now you'll believe it and know that we mean business. She has been taken good care of by a woman who has been with her constantly, an ex-nurse who knows her business. She is suffering with hysteria and the heat and is pretty weak but physically and mentally there's nothing wrong with her that won't mend soon once she's home. But though we've treated her respectfully in fairness to her position and value to us, what the future holds for her is entirely up to you. Our alternative is to sell her to old Felipe of Mexico City. We are sick and tired of her infernal preaching, she spouts Scripture in answer to everything.

"We took her for two reasons—: First to wreck that damned Temple and second: to collect a tidy half million. We have held her for a month during which time her name and standing have been just about ruined. We had to fight hard to kill that 'drowning' idea of yours but a little palm-oil brought forth plenty reports of her being seen all over the place and the newspaper hounds were only too anxious to play it up. They seem to have an axe to grind too and sure helped us grand. You've taken some of our girls, damn you, and given us many a jolt, but guess we are square now, eh?

"Now as to the ransom. We've been stumped for a method of collecting that would be safe, because you spilled it to the police before. It's plain no ordinary methods will work with you so we've sure doped out a corker, and while it has taken time and delayed things a bit it is apple pie for us. You got a week to raise the money, and on June 25th you will get the final letter with the instructions how to proceed to get the money into our hands.

"It might interest you to know just what happened on the beach a month ago today. Well we had inside workers who kept us informed as to her whereabouts, and that day she went to the beach looked like our chance. We watched until she was alone, then a man and woman stepped up to her with a heart-breaking tale of a deathly sick baby in a car across the street, and that Mother Kennedy had sent them down to the beach to find Aimee and ask her to pray for the kid. She kicked and insisted on going to the hotel to dress first but the argument of a dying kid together with the use of a long coat the woman carried persuaded her to come as she was. When she got into the car to pray for the imaginary kid a quick shove, a gag with some dope on it and a couple of blankets thrown over her, and away we went. Simple, wasn't it?

"Now get busy. Have the \$500,000 ready in big bills, watch for the final letter of instructions which will reach you next Friday. That letter you must keep absolutely confidential but you will alright when you read it. Follow the instructions exactly and on that same night you will have your Aimee back and we'll have the dough. If anything slips Felipe gets her.

The letter signed off, "Till Friday," with the typewritten signature, "The Avengers."

Mrs. Kennedy didn't put an ounce of faith in this strange document. It's text leaves no room for a vacillating verdict about Aimee Semple McPherson. You have to choose between believing her story of the disappearance or disbelieving it entirely, for there is no middle ground. A question which forces attention thus is, can it be conceivable that someone who had been doing good on the scale which brought the evangelist worldwide acclaim would suddenly turn bad and deliberately lie to so massive an extent. Those who knew Mrs. McPherson well dismissed the latter alternative as unthinkable. Those who knew about her, but did not approve her ministry in many cases, believed her

because they could not believe for a moment that if she had invented a tale it would sound so incredible as the story she told and stuck to without modification. She wasn't stupid.

When Mrs. McPherson related the story of her ordeal she described the actual abduction along the lines already reported. As the car raced away from Ocean Park she drifted into unconsciousness. Hours later, she supposed, she awakened in a bed, sick at her stomach. She vomited. A woman held a basin and bent over her prone form. "Where am I?" she muttered. The surroundings seemed strange. Wallpaper covered the walls, so she knew she was not at home in her room. The foot of the bed was enameled. This was different too.

Her first impression was that she had been involved in a car accident. Perhaps she was confined to a hospital. She blinked her eyes and cried again, "Where am I?" The woman hovering above did not answer. "What has happened? Where am I?" she repeated. Instead of responding, the woman hollered, "All right, Steve, come in." Not only Steve but another man barged into the room. Now things began coming back to the evangelist's mind. She remembered the pair at the beach who'd implored prayers for a dying baby. She remembered the driver who sat at the wheel of the car. These must be the same people.

The driver remained in the background, but Steve came to the bedside. "What is going on?" Sister demanded. But her mind was still hazy and she couldn't understand exactly what Steve was saying. Eventually she understood him to be boasting that they had finally snatched her after planning the kidnapping for some time. "You are being held for ransom," Steve blurted. "We are going to get that damned Temple." Mrs. McPherson would later state, 'I definitely remember that they used the expression 'get.'"

She no longer was wearing the green swimsuit, but found herself clothed instead with a white cotton nightgown. She struggled to sit up in bed. "I must get back to the

Temple!" she whined. Certainly this was a horrible joke.

The change in position intensified her nausea. Her head throbbed with pain. "I must get back to the Temple!"

Her captors cackled with laughter. Sister mentioned how worried Mother must be and exclaimed, "I cannot be spared from the Bible School. I have examination papers out."

Steve and Rose (the name the woman gave) and the other man simply sneered. Steve declared, "You will have to forget that. But if you are a good girl maybe you'll get to go home soon."

When the trio withdrew, Mrs. McPherson staggered over to a window which was boarded up almost to the top. However, the wood offered a few cracks through which she hoped to project a cry for help. Her voice sounded weak when she attempted a yell — "almost as if it were mocking me." But Steve heard the call from another room, rushed in, grabbed her shoulder and yanked her away from the window. He gave her a good shaking, shouted, "Stop that," and threw her back on to the bed.

But when she was alone again she repeated the attempt. All three burst into the room this time, corralled her, and Steve stuffed a gag into her mouth. A few minutes later they took it out, cautioning that a permanent gagging would follow one more outburst.

"Please send word to my family that I am alive," Sister pleaded. The abductors sneered, "You bet we will."

Mrs. McPherson said she lost all track of time. Having no access to a Bible made each day seem longer. "It was the longest period in my lifetime that had no reading of the Word of God," she complained. But she did attempt to convert the kidnappers. After her reappearance the District Attorney inquired about this and Sister answered, "I tried to convert them all." When Asa Keyes asked, "Did you have any success," she had to admit, "No, I'm afraid I didn't."

Steve seemed to spend a lot of time away from the captivity house. The other man whose name was never

mentioned in her presence — and Rose were there almost constantly. Rose slept at the foot of the evangelist's bed on a cot.

After the reappearance, officers asked Mrs. McPherson to describe the appointments of the house. She located her bed in relation to the rest of the furnishings, an old-fashioned dresser and table. In one corner a curtain concealed clothes hung behind it. The ceiling looked plastered. Blue-striped paper with pink flowers climbing up covered the walls. She guessed that it was a two story house for she supposed at times she heard footsteps overhead. "I was never allowed in any other parts of the house than the room with my bed and the bathroom," Mrs. McPherson said. A door from her room led to the small cubicle with a tub, wash basin, and toilet. Mrs. McPherson's testimony concerning that bathroom was misrepresented subsequently — translated to the crude shack from which she later escaped in the desert. Lately Thomas reproduced a hilariously bawdy poem which teased Deputy District Attorney Joe Ryan about this phantasy. The doggerel reports Mrs. McPherson answering Joe's question about the location of the shack:

*"Then Aimee said, 'Don't doubt me, Joe,  
That hut's somewhere in Mexico —  
An adobe hut with a wooden floor,  
And a flushing toilet, furthermore!'"*

The rhyme continued:

*"Joe scratched his head and kind of sighed,  
And then distrustingly replied  
(Quite sure that tale was bound to totter):  
'Where in the hell did they get the water?'"*

*"But Aimee wasn't to be caught  
By Ryan's sudden, wise onslaught;  
She shouted, with a burst of glee:  
'They got it from the Holy See!'"*  
(p.106, "Vanishing Evangelist")



The fact, of course, is that Mrs. McPherson never stated the shack in the Mexican desert from which she escaped — her final place of captivity — had an inside bathroom. The evangelist had grown up on a farm and knew all about rural sanitation facilities. The bathroom was in the first house where she was held. Someone — accidentally or deliberately — promulgated the fiction that she said it was in the shack. A study of the transcript of the original statement the evangelist made to Cline and Ryan after her reappearance confirms that the bathroom was said to be in the house. But the misrepresentation persists even to present day rehashes of the incident.

At this first place of captivity Mrs. McPherson ate all her meals in her room. Rose usually brought canned foods, but sometimes she prepared boiled potatoes which the evangelist relished.

Mrs. McPherson recalled a certain day when Steve came back from one of his trips. He was in a foul mood. She heard him growling in the other room, "Don't they think we know a damned dick when we see one, even if he is beribboned?" At the time the evangelist had no idea what he could have meant. Not until after her return to the Temple did she learn details of the San Francisco police's follow up of the "Revengers" ransom letter which her mother dismissed as a hoax. If Steve and Company actually scrawled the letter in question, he was not deceived by the ruse at the hotel, when two detectives wore Temple ribbon-badges and carried a bundle representing the ransom money.

Eventually her captors confided how much ransom they were demanding. The evangelist scoffed, "Why, our people cannot pay that. That's almost as much as our property is worth. Nobody on earth could raise that!"

"Oh, they can raise it all right," Steve announced confidently. "You've got that many people who would give a thousand dollars each to get you back."

That statement doubtless was true. When the evangelist,

however, insisted, "You'll never get it," they contradicted decisively, "We will get it."

Nevertheless, the trio betrayed considerable concern over the fact that Mrs. Kennedy could not be shaken from her conclusion that her daughter had drowned. They confided to Mrs. McPherson that they had people at the Temple pretending to be reporters and detectives — people who had insinuated themselves "on the very inside and knew everything that was going on." Presumably these agents were trying to undermine the drowning conclusion. The evangelist never mentioned this circumstance to the public for many years, for fear people would suspect she was inventing a wild tale.

Though not noted for being particularly observant, Sister tried to make mental notes of details which might help the authorities apprehend the captors once she was released. She was able to give a quite comprehensive description of the two men and Rose to the authorities afterwards. And at times she attempted to elicit from Rose statements which might help an eventual investigation. But the evangelist usually dead-ended in a blind alley: "That's enough, Dearie," Rose would declare. "We won't go into that, Dearie." Rose did admit she had been a nurse, and she acted like one, but more like the kind who worked in psychopathic wards restraining the obstreperous or violent. Outside of occasional outbursts betraying frustration in attempts to collect ransom, Steve and his male colleague acted respectfully toward their captive. "There were no insults nor affronts," she remembered. "Sometimes I feel that those folks were almost kinder to me than some of the people I had dealings with after I made my escape and got away."

Whether Steve and his crony were Wilson and Miller who contacted blind attorney McKinley in Long Beach on May 31, or whether Wilson and Miller were accomplices of the active kidnappers or "doing their thing" on their own, lying about having the evangelist in captivity, it is a fact, according to Mrs.

McPherson's story of the ordeal, that Rose commenced pumping her for information responsive to the questions Mrs. Kennedy tendered to McKinley and he claimed to have passed on to the pair who engaged him as a go-between with the Temple. Is there any way Steve and Rose could have obtained those questions except from contact with McKinley? Subsequently, Mrs. Kennedy suggested that the questions got into the newspapers, which if they did would explain Rose's use of them apart from a connection with Miller and Wilson. The disappearance of the "Revengers" letter from the locked secret files of the Los Angeles police department lends credence to the possibility, at least, that there could have been a leak through the police department. Cline was given by Long Beach detectives a copy of the questions, so the Los Angeles department had them.

Here is one of the several unsolved mysteries of the case, unless Miller and Wilson were Steve and his partner. And if they were, you have the problem of the discrepancy in the amount of money demanded. Steve told Mrs. McPherson they were asking one-half million dollars, the same amount specified in the "Revengers" letter of May 24 and the "Avengers" letter of June 18. But Wilson and Miller asked McKinley to get them only \$25,000, the amount of the reward offer then in force. People who denied Mrs. McPherson's account and dismissed Wilson and Miller as elements of the alleged conspiracy have an even greater problem with this discrepancy, for if Sister and Mother and others were fabricating a plot, they certainly would have been consistent in the sum of money desiderated for the return of the evangelist.

A possibility of reconciliation of the discrepancy is the contingency that the kidnappers intended to collect the reward, then hold out for the larger ransom. Against this, however, it might be urged that Mrs. Kennedy, having once been burned to the tune of twenty-five grand, would never kick through another nickel, but rather thereafter stubbornly

hold to the drowning theory against all odds. But, of course, Steve and Company would not have known that.

Rose put the questions to the evangelist in such a way that at first she didn't realize she was being grilled. One day when Steve came home Rose commented, "It is certainly hot. A hammock would feel good today." A moment later she inquired casually, "Do you like hammocks? Did you ever have one?"

Mrs. McPherson replied, "Yes, we had a wire hammock when I was a little girl." Rose continued, "Was it on the piazza?" to which the evangelist responded that it was out under an apple tree. A further query elicited the reply that she had slept on it at times.

A bit later Rose asked, "Do you like dogs?" When Sister conceded she did, the nurse continued, "Did you ever have a dog?" The evangelist told her about Gypsy, thus answering her mother's second question. But just at that moment Sister saw Steve standing in the doorway, sporting a pleased grin. His expression suddenly made Mrs. McPherson suspicious, and she countered, "Why are you asking me these questions?"

Rose tried to pass the matter off as of no consequence, but finally Steve spilled the beans about the interrogation. "If you'll just answer the rest of these questions your old lady will know you're alive and will come through with the money." The captors then showed Sister part of a newspaper containing a dispatch reporting how Mrs. Kennedy had provided questions for McKinley. Mrs. McPherson's statement later did not divulge whether the paper printed the actual questions or not, nor was this question ever addressed to her by her interrogators, so far as I have been able to ascertain.

"I won't answer any more questions," Sister snapped with determination. "I'll not help them raise the money."

"Oh, you won't, won't you?" Steve growled. "We'll see about that!" He grabbed her wrist and shoved his cigar down

hard against her fingers. The marks of the burns were still visible during the grand jury Hearing in July, and Sister showed them in response to a question by one juror.

"Go ahead," the evangelist challenged after Steve stabbed the cigar. He hesitated, then stopped the rough stuff. He even acted a little ashamed.

In the days following, Sister thought she detected anxiety among her captors about how to collect and not get caught. Then Rose came and cut off a lock of her hair. A typewriter clattered in the other room. "It sounded to me that it was being operated by an amateur," Sister recalled. Steve was still up tight about convincing Mother her daughter was alive. One day he discovered one of the evangelist's fingers which had a permanent scar where it had been injured during childhood by a corn sickle. He told Rose, whom Mrs. McPherson wondered whether she was his wife, "If the hair won't convince her people, we can send that finger next." Sister shuddered. She didn't know whether to take Steve seriously, but she feared he was capable of carrying out the threat.

Then came the move to Mexico. Rose roused Sister from bed that night and ordered, "Get into your clothes." For a moment the evangelist entertained hopes she was going home, but Rose soon undeceived her. "We're taking you for a short time somewhere where nobody can find you."

Rose and the other man led her blindfolded to the car. Steve did not make the trip with them. Only three were in the car when, shortly after lurching into motion, Rose removed the blindfold. Rose ordered Sister to lie in the bottom of the car on the narrow mattress she had brought from her own cot. Hands and feet were tied, but somewhat loosely.

The journey lasted all night and until dark the next day. At one point Rose gagged her, but only briefly. They stopped in the desert a couple of times for comfort stops, but no landmarks appeared within vision.

At the eventual destination the blindfold went on again.

Here, after being led into a crude hut, Sister heard from Rose about a newspaper report that her mother had collapsed. The evangelist became "sick and hysterical and could not eat anything."

Steve was either on hand upon arrival or came shortly afterwards. He unloaded from his auto some brown khaki soldier cots, a camp chair, and several utensils.

The shack had two rooms, and the men spent most of their time in the other or away from the cabin altogether. Rose told her, "Now, Dearie, if your mother behaves you will be out of here perhaps by Friday."

But Tuesday proved better than Friday. The men had driven off in one car, and Rose announced she must go for supplies in the other. "I will be right back," the nurse promised, "but I am going to have to tie you." She insisted that Sister turn over, then bound her hands and feet with some kind of stitched strapping rather like bed ticking. Evidently the distance from civilization made it unnecessary for Rose to gag her.

Sister heard the auto roar away. Hope soared. For the first time in her captivity she was alone. "Praise the Lord!" she reacted. "Here is an opportunity to get away." But could she get untied? And would she be able to walk if she could? She felt utterly weak. She resorted to prayer, meanwhile trying to wiggle out of her bonds. She soon realized that would be impossible. But across the room a five-gallon tin can similar to what was used for maple syrup spurred her hopes. The top had been cut off roughly. She resolved to try to get to the can and saw her straps on the sharp edge.

Somehow she managed to roll from the bed and across the floor to the can which stood against the wall. She leaned back and succeeded in cutting the bonds which held her wrists.

When she got back to civilization one of the first questions betraying skepticism concerning her story was the fact that her wrists did not appear to have been cut. Later in

Los Angeles, reporter Collins of the *Herald* newspaper told her, "Mrs. McPherson, I don't believe your story, because no one could cut their hands loose in that way without cutting their wrists." So Sister showed them. Representatives were invited one night to the parsonage. Mrs. Kennedy tied her daughter securely while she lay on a couch. A can rested at the other side of the room. Someone timed the demonstration. It took only thirty seconds for the evangelist to roll over to the can and saw her hands free. And again she did not cut her wrists — not at all! Three times thereafter she repeated the same demonstration, and never lacerated her wrists in the least, as many witnesses confirmed! So no one should doubt the evangelist's story on the score that she didn't cut her wrists!

In the captivity shack she proceeded to loose her feet. She prayed for strength as she squeaked to her feet. It was hard to stand at first, but with each passing moment "strength began coming in a God-given flood," she recalled.

For some reason, in her haste to escape before Rose could return, Sister gave no thought to the door which was closed. She climbed out an open window. A short drop landed her on the ground. She didn't stop to look at anything, simply started out cross-country, anxious to put as much distance as possible between herself and the hut before her captor came back. Unfortunately, she did not give the exterior of the shack a single glimpse, so it would be difficult to identify it from the outside in the eventual search. It had been dark, and she was blindfolded, when a few days earlier she was dragged into the cabin.

Mrs. McPherson related graphic descriptions of her desert trek in the two books which discussed the kidnapping, "In the Service of the King" (Boni and Liveright, New York) and "The Story of My Life" (Word Books, Waco, Texas). Her dramatic prowess appears at its best in the chapter entitled "The Escape" in the former volume:

"Sand!

"Gray sand!

"A wilderness of sand!

"Lost in the desert — and night closing in!

" 'Help!'

" 'H—E—L—P,' I cried as I stumbled over the wasteland.

" 'H—E—L—P,' came the mocking echo, growing softer and softer in the distance until it sobbed its way into the death-like stillness of the desert dusk.

"How small in the great infinitude, how utterly futile was my voice! The sound of it was as a drop of water absorbed by the great sponge of that endless expanse — swallowed up by the maws of space.

"A drooping, forlorn, cotton-clad figure, I trudged falteringly into the swelling gloom. I wavered, staggered, scarcely able to lift one foot after the other. The heavy shoes, far too large for me, chafed burning blisters . . ." (p.11).

Lately Thomas in "Storming Heaven" lists "In the Service of the King" as "ghost-written" (p.354), but Mae Waldron, then Mrs. McPherson's stenographer told me, "Why I typed that book!" Mrs. McPherson wrote it, though she discussed its contents with others on the Temple staff.

Fortunately for Mrs. McPherson, the day of her desert wanderings was, though warm, the coolest day in some time, both before and after, in the area, as weather records confirmed. This was no blazing Sahara, even though the date was June 22 — a Tuesday.

Sister had no way of knowing exactly what time she escaped the hut or how long she trekked or how far. Since she had no hat, she improvised a sunbonnet out of her dress which she gathered up around her head, affording protection from sunburn. She also protected her arms with the heavy, closely-woven fabric.

Some people perspire less than others, and Mrs.

McPherson claimed she was one of them. Weeks later some wiseacre quipped, "If Aimee had sweated more then, she would be sweating less now." By that time skeptics were dismissing as impossible a desert jaunt such as she described without more noticeable effects on her person and clothing. But desert experts from the area would dramatically demonstrate in court that they had made comparable treks with equally minimal effects.

At times the evangelist wondered whether she was wandering around in circles. She felt thirsty, but did not seem to be suffering acutely. The area of her wanderings covered a somewhat elevated region where the temperature was a few degrees cooler than on the flat desert. "Though I had all the water I wanted to drink the morning at the shack," she related, "Naturally I became thirsty in the afternoon. I wanted a drink, but I can't say I was dying for it."

Because the sun was marching to her left, Mrs. McPherson figured she was travelling north. In the days to come trackers would find footprints they assumed were hers far out in the desert. From following them some estimated she had hiked twenty miles. The evangelist described the lay-of-the-land: "The terrain was not especially rugged or rocky. Certainly there were cactus and catburs that would stick you, but these I managed to avoid. The country was not one which would cut up a person's shoes by any means. Deputy District Attorney Ryan himself said that he could walk two days on it without his commissary shoes being marked" (p.159, "The Story of My Life"). That is what Ryan said the first day he tackled that desert, when Mrs. McPherson crossed the border back into Mexico to help hunt for the shack. But when Ryan got back to Los Angeles he talked out of the other side of his mouth. Mrs. McPherson continued, "I did, occasionally, however, stumble on stones as I journeyed."

From time to time she had to lie down to regain strength before resuming the hike. When she would get up she thought her dress was filthy, but the sand was such that it

brushed right off easily, not staining like soil or dirt.

From the position of the sun, Sister supposed it was about 3:30 p.m. when she caught a glimpse in the distance of an elevation which would be later identified to her as Niggerhead Mountain. She hoped to climb to the top and survey the surrounding countryside, but darkness fell before she reached the hill. She intoned a prayer for guidance and stumbled on. Before long, when she climbed a slight rise, lights glowed in the distance — what turned out to be the village of Agua Prieta, Mexico and the smelter fires of Douglas, Arizona. "Thank God!" she gasped.

In time her path led to a reasonably good road. Weariness seemed to dictate sleeping off to the side of the road and plodding on to civilization after dawn. Of course, if a vehicle came along and she could hail it, so much the better.

She had hardly settled down to sleep, however, when a rustle in some bushes terrified her. She'd heard about desert creatures. Back on the road she found walking much easier than on the trackless desert.

Eventually she neared a small building on her left, a sentry hut which proved vacant. No one was there to respond to her cries, "Help! Is anybody here?" Later dogs barking in the distance drew her to a structure about three hundred feet to the right of the road. Fredrick Conrad Schansel responded to her shouts, but she shuddered when he advised the compound was a slaughterhouse and that he was the only one there, and that he had no telephone and no automobile. "Have you a horse?" Mrs. McPherson asked. Schansel said, "No." "Will you go with me into the town?" she pleaded, but the custodian of the slaughterhouse declined. He seemed to want her to come in, but after eliciting directions to "the first house where there will be a lady," she stumbled on, though she had to stop and rest several times. Eventually she reached Agua Prieta. Big dogs growling and little dogs yipping discouraged her from seeking help at the small houses she reached first. "Perhaps I can find a policeman in



town," she hoped, so continued on. But when she reached a somewhat larger dwelling with a hedge growing around it, she realized she'd passed the limits of endurance. She stumbled to the gate and called, "Won't you please help me?" A man's voice answered, "Who are you? What do you want?" "The police," Sister gasped. "Have you a telephone?"

Ramon Gonzales answered, "No, but there is one across the street, one block."

Mrs. McPherson had entered the gate and reached the steps to the porch. She retraced her route, hoping to get to the phone. "One block — just — one — more — block — now," she muttered. But at the gate at the end of Gonzales' walk she collapsed. Ramon and his wife rushed to the fallen woman. At first they believed she had died, for when they held lighted matches in her face, her eyes did not dilate.

For an hour, Sister was told later by the Gonzales' she lay there unconscious. When the Mexican couple detected traces of life they covered her with blankets.

Mrs. McPherson's skeptics in the following weeks made much ado about the fact that she did not ask the Gonzales' for water for an hour after she stumbled onto their property. But how could she ask for water when she was unconscious, as the Gonzales' reported? If the reappearance had been a phony act, the evangelist would certainly have made water her first plea before feigning collapse, for she knew certainly that such a request would be expected in her circumstances. She had several weeks to fabricate a story, and if she had done so it would have been far more believable than the actual facts were.

But when Sister did come to, she begged, "Water! Water, please." The Gonzales provided two glasses which she gulped down.

"But why didn't you ask for water at the slaughterhouse earlier?" skeptics would pillory in weeks to come. Sister replied, "For the same reasons I did not stay there. In my upset frame of mind the man's appearance prompted me to

get going quickly. He was too eager for me to come in."

The evangelist remained in a daze as Mrs. Gonzales rubbed her hands. They asked, "Senorita, Senora, what is the matter?" It sounded so much better than Rose's gushy, "Dearie."

Sister stammered the story of her abduction and escape to the Gonzales' and other Mexicans whom they summoned. Someone rounded up an American taxi-driver, John Anderson, who had brought a fare over from Arizona. Liquor was legal in Mexico during Prohibition in the United States, and the taverns and roadhouses of Agua Prieta attracted many Americans. "I am Mrs. McPherson," Sister told the cabbie. He didn't believe her fully, but nevertheless transported her across the border to the police headquarters in Douglas. An officer emerged and invited, "Get out of the car." Mrs. McPherson, however, felt too exhausted to move. "Who are you?" the policeman inquired. "I am Mrs. McPherson," she gasped. "I do not believe you," he blurted. "Many people have claimed they were Aimee Semple McPherson, but they were not."

"I don't care whether you believe me or not, I am Mrs. McPherson, and I want to go home," she stammered.

The evangelist's breath dispelled suspicions she was drunk, a likely assumption considering she just came from Mexico where the taverns had closed only a short time earlier. "You are sick," she heard a diagnosis. "You should go to the hospital. Or would you rather go to the hotel?" She preferred the hospital. But she had no money, not a single cent.

By this time, O.E. Patterson had arrived to replace George Cook at the police station. Patterson volunteered to take a chance that the woman was Sister and guarantee the bill. With Cook he arranged for admittance at the Calumet, Arizona hospital after the taxi brought her to the entrance.

People there scoffed at her claimed identity, but proceeded to clean her up. She described her face and

shoes as "white with desert dust" and her hands as "covered with grime." A nurse picked some cactus spines from her legs and rubbed some preparation on a toe where a blister had broken.

A parade of curious people came to the bedside. Virtually everyone reacted, "I don't believe it," when she claimed her identity. But when Editor McCafferty of the Douglas *Dispatch* newspaper entered the room, the doubts were dispelled. He took one look at the woman whose revival he had covered in Denver and announced, "That's Mrs. McPherson." She remembered him too. Douglas, Arizona would make headlines that June 23, 1926.

## CHAPTER 7

### **"Extra! Read All About It!"**

A holiday mood prevailed throughout Douglas, Arizona on June 23, 24 and 25, the three days Sister spent in the city after her escape from Mexican captivity. Many townspeople took one or more of the days off, either in order to celebrate her reappearance or to bask in their hometown's sudden fame, or both.

The story made extra good business for the telephone and telegraph companies. The Rocky Mountain Telephone Company did the largest business in long distance calls in its history, logging 500 calls to Los Angeles alone, at an average cost of \$10.00 each. Western Union, meanwhile, flashed more than 95,000 words from Douglas to Los Angeles newspapers, including one transmission of 7,000 words — Mrs. McPherson's detailed statement made to Captain Cline and Deputy District Attorney Ryan — which the *Examiner* described as "believed to be the longest legal statement ever sent by telegraph in the history of Western Union" (p. 2, June 28, 1926). That newspaper boasted that this transmission had been addressed to it, but evidently the *Examiner* couldn't

get an exclusive, for the *Times* printed most, if not all, of it too.

Los Angeles *Evening Express* had the best of it on the first day, and the editors didn't hesitate to publicize their feats. "Express Scores Great M'Pherson Story Beat" captioned an article which crowed:

"It may not be modest, and we hate to make the opposition feel any worse than they do now — if that is possible — but the news 'scoop' or 'beat' of the *Evening Express* today upon the discovery of Aimee Semple McPherson, missing evangelist, was so complete and outstanding that it really commands some comment.

"The *Evening Express* was on the streets of Los Angeles in the hands of newsboys almost two hours before any other afternoon paper was being sold on the downtown streets. . .

"Not only that, but the first *Evening Express* extra was on the streets more than half an hour before an extra issued by a morning paper that had the advantage of a staff that had been on duty several hours and were in their best shape to handle an extra, was out. . .

"Thus, once again it is demonstrated that in getting ALL THE NEWS, all the news FIRST and ALL THE NEWS FIRST ALL THE TIME, the *Evening Express* is in a class by itself, far ahead of any competitors." (p. 2, June 23, 1926).

The same newspaper boasted that its representative was the "first and only reporter in the house (parsonage beside the Temple) and in conversation with Mother Kennedy for almost an hour after the first report (of the reappearance) came in" (*ibid.*). But the *Evening Express* wasn't averse to printing a misrepresentation, if not a bold-faced lie, for the paper proclaimed that "news of the discovery" of the evangelist alive "was personally taken to her (Mother Kennedy) by an *Evening Express* reporter"

(*ibid.*). Actually it was Police Captain Herman Cline who broke the news to Mrs. Kennedy.

Meanwhile, the Los Angeles *Record* captioned its counter-claim, "THE TRUTH — QUICK!" and rationalized:

"Today as usual the *Record* was the Los Angeles newspaper to give the public the first accurate, detailed, and complete story of the finding of Aimee Semple McPherson alive.

"Rival newspapers which ran neck and neck with the *Record* in the race to put extra editions on the downtown streets did NOT carry sufficient facts to establish the truth of the astounding news.

"One afternoon rival, which arrived on the streets from half-an-hour to an hour later than the *Record*, did not carry a verified report of the story.

"The *Record*, via airplane, long-distance telephone and telegraph, will continue to provide The Truth Quick and first, regarding Aimee Semple McPherson's thrilling escape from kidnappers" (p. 2, June 23, 1926).

On the front page of the same issue — bannered in big letters 5th EXTRA — the information "Record Sends Reporter and Cameraman By Air," captions about eight column inches of copy. Jack Carberry and E.E. McDowell chartered a plane named "King Tut" which took off from Clover Field.

However, the *Record* was counting its chickens before they hatched. The next day a rival's headline's blared, "EXPRESS WINS AIRPLANE RACE FOR AIMEE PHOTOS." A picture five columns wide and four inches deep showed Mrs. McPherson on a hospital bed in Douglas with the Mayor of Douglas, A.E. Hinton, sitting to the right of her bedside. The

article claimed that the *Evening Express* had "scored the 'scoop' of the year over all other Southern California newspapers" when it won "one of the most thrilling" races to "obtain pictures and a complete story of Aimee Semple McPherson for the public of Los Angeles." The *Express* claimed it "issued an extra containing the first photographs of the evangelist to be shown since her rescue" and touted the story its reporters wired back, "It reads like a novel and is replete with thrills, a tale of newspapermen and their work in the raw" (p. 1, June 24, 1926).

Probably the reason why the *Express* scooped the competition had to do with its Associated Press connections. No other Los Angeles afternoon daily subscribed to AP, and that association got the story out one hour ahead of any other wire service. And Associated Press did not hesitate to brag about its speed either!

Accustomed as people are today to get the latest news, not from the press but over radio and television, it is hard for many who never heard paper hawkers screeching, "Extreel Extreel! Read all about it!", to realize the fierce competition which used to involve the press in newspaper wars and no-holds-barred struggles to increase circulation at the expense of rivals.

Mother Kennedy refused to believe the good news that her daughter was alive. So completely committed was she to the drowning theory that not even the voice of Mrs. McPherson over the telephone wire convinced her at first. She fired about twenty questions concerning matters no one but the evangelist could have easily explained before being fully persuaded. That night she and her grandchildren took the Southern Pacific train for Douglas. Cline and Ryan rode the same train.

Meanwhile, back in the Arizona city, reporters from less distant cities than Los Angeles commenced checking out the evangelist's story. The initial reports from Douglas described Mrs. McPherson as in considerably less favorable condition

physically than would be printed in weeks to follow. Some accounts proved contradictory. The Los Angeles *Evening Express* may have gotten out the news first, but it erred in reporting that Sister was "covered with mud" when she "staggered into Agua Prieta" wearing a "mud stained garment" (June 23, 1926, p. 2). There was, of course, no mud.

Later accounts would emphasize that the clothing the evangelist wore was not noticeably soiled and that her shoes showed little or no wear. However, John Anderson, the taxi-driver who transported her from Agua Prieta to Douglas, told reporters that when he picked her up her clothing was "frayed and soiled," as the Los Angeles *Herald* reported (June 23, 1926).

But by June 24 doubts were being expressed that the evangelist could have made her desert trek without shoes and dress showing more wear. The *Record* had reported the shoes "scuffed," and Douglas Police Chief Percy Bowden noticed that Sister's feet were "blistered and she was exhausted" (p. 2, June 23, 1926). But that didn't muzzle the skeptics. Mrs. Kennedy would attempt to counter the doubts on Friday the 25th by calling to reporters attention the condition of the dress and shoes her daughter had worn out onto the desert in search of the captivity shack that morning. The white poplin silk dress was "barely soiled," Mrs. Kennedy pointed out when her daughter stood and turned about for the benefit of reporters present. "You can see that it isn't torn, and also that her shoes are not badly scratched or marred."

On the other hand, the Los Angeles *Record* stated, concerning the shoes Sister wore in from the desert, that the "uppers were as good as new, while the soles were badly scarred and stained with juices from weeds and grass," but made that concession at the tag end of a dispatch captioned, "Aimee Shoes in Good Shape: Fail to Show Effect of Travel in Desert, Ariz. Sheriff's Claim" (May 24, 1926). Throughout the case the evangelist complained that news favorable to her was usually buried at the end of the articles while statements

skeptical of her story were featured in the leads. Actually she had less to resent in the *Record* than any other Los Angeles daily because that paper at least professed to handling the story objectively. The other newspapers openly scouted her account.

The Sheriff who frankly told the evangelist, on the basis of her shoes and clothing, that he did not believe her story was James A. McDonald of Cochise County, Arizona, who lost his bid for re-election later that year, some observers assessed, because of his constituent's displeasure with the position he took against Mrs. McPherson. C.E. Cross, an opponent who favored Mrs. McPherson but a man little known publicly, also lost out in that contest.

The issue of the evangelists's clothing and shoes would simmer for months, all the way into the last days of the preliminary hearing when expert witnesses from the Arizona desert would appear to confirm that they had made comparable treks without their clothes or shoes showing any more wear or soiling than did Sister's. But that was late October.

On June 23, investigators interviewed individuals who saw the evangelist from the outset of her return. They learned from Officer George W. Cook that he had inspected the red welts on her wrists which she attributed to the rope which had tied them. Cook saw nothing to make him doubt that the splotches had developed otherwise. He had smelled her breath for liquor and commented, "I don't know whether you call it a constipated breath, but like my own breath when my stomach is empty or a person is upset."

The seeming discrepancies between reports of witnesses who saw Mrs. McPherson a few hours after her return and reported how badly she looked, and witnesses who saw her several hours later and noted her condition as surprisingly good, may be reconcilable on the theory of her demonstrated rapid recovery proclivities. Once she had talked to her family she improved immeasurably.

Yet, still several hours after that telephone reunion, Maude J. Robinson saw the evangelist and could not believe it was the same woman whose ministry she had followed for years. Mrs. Robinson and her thirteen year old daughter, Mary Ellen, were on the Southern Pacific train which stopped at the Douglas, Arizona depot about 4 p.m. on June 23. While the train stood in the station, Mrs. Robinson saw headlines on the *Douglas Dispatch* heralding the evangelist's reappearance. Hastily she arranged a stop-over and hurried to the hospital to see the evangelist, "not out of curiosity but with a desire to help." The authorities would not permit Mrs. Robinson to see Sister. She thereupon contacted the Douglas reporter who had written the story in the *Dispatch*. He obtained permission for Mrs. Robinson, who lived at 604 Glenwood Road in Glendale, California, to visit the evangelist. She reported, "Because of the emaciated condition in which I found Mrs. McPherson in the Douglas Hospital, it was difficult for me to recognize her as the same person, and I found myself questioning as to whether or not it was not some other person, impersonating Mrs. McPherson." When those doubts dispelled, Mrs. Robinson declared, "Her physical condition when I saw her in Douglas, Arizona showed clearly that she had undergone a severe strain of nervous energy." Sister had a "hunted" look about her eyes, indicating to me that she had suffered extreme fear recently." Mrs. Robinson, whose statement was witnessed by Edna A. Thatcher, would have been one of the witnesses called by the defense at the jury trial, had the case against Mrs. McPherson been prosecuted, to testify concerning the evangelist's actual appearance and condition after arrival in Douglas, countering some who pretended she looked like the picture of health! But, of course, District Attorney Keyes dismissed the case against the evangelist, conceding that he could not hope to secure a conviction with the evidence in the state it was.

Hours before Mrs. Robinson saw Sister, during recital of



her ordeal to some of the first interviewers, Mrs. McPherson, according to the *Evening Express* extra, "lapsed many times into a stupor, the result of exhaustion" (p. 2, June 23, 1926). Even three days later her face still showed signs of strain. The *Sunday Examiner* published a picture taken soon after she arrived back in Los Angeles on Saturday. The caption included, "This picture clearly reveals the fatigue that has touched her features with new and sharp lines."

Meanwhile, investigators were trying to trace origin of the clothing the evangelist had worn in from the desert. It did not take long to ascertain that the dress had been purchased at Levy Brothers on or after June 14 during a special sale which offered this particular "sleazy" costume at \$1.00. Salesmen in the store on G Avenue in Douglas recalled seeing a man and woman fitting Mrs. McPherson's descriptions of Steve and Rose making purchases in the store during that period.

Efforts were also made to trace the origin of the Bon Ton corset numbered 728, carrying a factory number of 24632, and the size 6½ shoes with New Era heels number 54-761 which, because they were too large, raised blisters on the evangelist's feet. She said they belonged to Rose. Eventually Joe Ryan learned that this particular style was about ten years old. The proprietor of Bechtel's dry good store in San Pedro told him that the only place where this number was available was a certain store in San Diego. The shoes were never traced either.

And so the news wires hummed with facts and fables and fantasies.

## CHAPTER 8

# Return

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Mother Kennedy, Rolf and Roberta entered Mrs. McPherson's room in the Douglas hospital on Thursday morning. But they were not allowed a family reunion, for barging in at the same time came Herman Cline and Joe Ryan, who insisted upon an immediate interrogation.

Why had they come? To the evangelist and her mother they professed to be seeking clues in order to track down the kidnappers. But if the two women had seen the Los Angeles newspapers in the evening the family and Los Angeles officials entrained for Douglas, they might have entertained a more suspicious expectation. For the *Herald* article announcing the departure of the family added, "With the party were Captain of Detectives Herman Cline and Deputy District Attorney Joe Ryan who will investigate Mrs. McPherson's story for the purpose of determining whether she was actually kidnapped" (p. 12, June 23, 1926). This on the evening of the very day the evangelist reappeared! Had Cline and Ryan leaked to the press that soon their skepticism about Sister's story?

Sometime later a woman who said she lived next door to the Ryans, advised Mrs. Kennedy that on that same morning of June 23, Mrs. Ryan discussed the case with her and stated that her husband was going to Douglas with his father-in-law Cline and that they would break Mrs. McPherson's story.

But Cline and Ryan manifested no appearance of skepticism at the evangelist's bedside. Mrs. Kennedy did manage to get a few whispered words with her daughter before the grilling commenced. Authorities later questioned her, suggesting that her mother had coached her concerning her story. Not so, Sister insisted, "Mother simply asked me the question any mother would ask her daughter under the circumstances — if I was alright. I told her I was" (p. 167, "The Story of My Life"). She complained, "The authorities never gave me a second alone with my family until they had extracted every bit of my story" (*ibid.*).

When Cline and Ryan commenced the questioning they professed — even protested — perfect faith in Mrs. McPherson's story. Mrs. Kennedy was most emphatic on this matter, and she was present throughout the interrogation. "Never once did they tell her that they doubted her story and that her story was going to be used against her." Both the evangelist and her mother requested that the typewritten transcript of the interview, recorded stenographically, be brought back for her to read and O.K. before it was released. Cline and Ryan continued "all the time that we were in Douglas," Mrs. Kennedy announced, claiming, "Captain Cline gave us to understand that he believed in us but that the newspaper men were stirring up trouble."

The Los Angeles newspapers confirmed this profession — or was it pretense? The *Express* on June 25 captioned a story, "CLINE CERTAIN OF AIMEE STORY," and reported that the police captain told Associated Press reporters the night before that he was "firmly convinced" that Mrs. McPherson had been kidnapped. "There is absolutely nothing to make me disbelieve Mrs. McPherson's version of

her abduction from that California beach," he said after weighing reports of the desert search for tracks and shack and the transcript of the evangelist's story. And the next day's *Record* headlined its account, "Cline Believes," and pointed out, "Cline's belief is contrariwise to that of the Arizona Sheriff who today told Aimee flatly he did not believe her story."

Evidently Cline and Ryan, from the first, were talking out of both sides of their mouths. At the preliminary hearing Ryan would testify that he knew the evangelist was a "fake and a hypocrite" when he saw her the first time in the Douglas hospital!

At that initial interrogation, Lately Thomas reports — probably on the basis of some later statement by Cline or Ryan that "Cline endeavored to obtain an accurate description of her three captors, without marked success" (p. 78, "The Vanishing Evangelist"). The temptation is almost irresistible to reproduce the many columns of newspaper copy which profess to report verbatim the interview in question, because it would be difficult to locate in any literature, more detailed descriptions than the evangelist offered in response to scores of questions Cline and Ryan fired with machine-gun rapidity.

Sister described Steve as about forty years of age and about five feet ten inches tall, weighing approximately two hundred pounds. He had a light complexion and brown eyes arched with rather heavy, but not bushy, eyebrows. His face showed no scars or peculiar marks, but there were pronounced lines. When he talked, he drew his brows together.

Steve's dress generally was a brown suit, though once Sister saw him in gray. His hat was a soft fedora.

When the questioning switched to the other man, the evangelist guessed his age as between 35 and 40 and his height at six feet. "He had a flat chest. He was rather bony. It is hard to guess his weight — say about 160 pounds," she recalled, adding that his complexion was dark and his beard

quite noticeable even shortly after shaving. He had one upper gold tooth, quite near the front on the left side, and lines around a corner of his mouth. He usually wore black. She could not remember seeing him wearing a hat. His speech betrayed no noticeable accent.

"Now this woman called Rose," the questioning continued, "do you think she was an American?" "I think so," Sister said. She estimated Rose's height as "a little taller than myself." "How tall are you?" "Five feet five inches," Sister replied. But a short time later she was measured at one and one-half inches shorter. Rose "had plump arms and was rather heavy set and full chested. Her hair was black; her eyes were dark brown; her face was rather olive but not dark." Her hair style was a bushy bob. "It would come out forward on her cheeks and was a little longer in the back." She had rather full lips and "her nose as a little wide. She did not have long eyelashes, but there were no blemishes."

Mrs. McPherson felt she gave as complete a description of the trio of the abductors as she could. "Certainly I answered their every question," and the transcript shows that she did, even though the published version had "some slight errors which twisted the meaning" a bit, according to the evangelist (*op. cit.* 170).

After the interrogation, Mrs. McPherson left the hospital and with her family checked into the Gadsden Hotel, from which quite early Friday morning she left to accompany authorities into the desert to search for the captivity shack. Already expert desert trackers had found her footprints at sundry spots along her route, where the nature of the ground would preserve the tracks. The evangelist agreed willingly to the expedition, although she warned, "I don't even know which direction it (the hut) was. I only know I came in by the road by that big mountain."

Since already skeptics were scoffing that she could have made the long trek without water, Mrs. McPherson volunteered to go without water all that day in the search,

even though it was warmer that Friday than on Tuesday by several degrees, as official records kept at Douglas' Copper Queen smelter confirmed. The evangelist issued a challenge that, if her word was doubted, she would gladly walk the same distance without water and let the skeptics examine her condition, clothing, and shoes after the trek.

"No, Mrs. McPherson, don't be foolish," a reporter riding in the car objected. Is it possible the press did not want her to prove her stamina by such a demonstration? The reporter thrust a cup of water into her hand and encouraged her to drink it.

The evangelist would make to the grand jury in July the same offer, all to no avail. "I wondered why no one in authority seemed to want to let me walk into Agua Prieta again from the distant places where my footprints had been found," she reflected (p. 170, *op. cit.*). Before she left the hotel in Douglas that morning, the officers had told her that trackers had already found her footprints about thirteen miles from Agua Prieta. Later discoveries would extend the distance to approximately twenty miles.

Probably the most ambitious tracker at the beginning of the investigation was C.E. Cross. He heard the story of Mrs. McPherson's reappearance at about 8 a.m. on Wednesday, May 23, at the Douglas police station. With others he headed for the desert and located footprints presumably made by Sister up to distances of nine miles from the slaughterhouse near Agua Prieta. But the searchers found no shack. Cross returned to Douglas to ask questions of Mrs. McPherson and saw her for the first time at about 1:00 p.m. The conversation lasted about thirty minutes. Also present were policeman Leslie Gatliff of Douglas, Mr. Folsom Moore, and Mr. George Spear. Cross inspected the hospital patient closely, observing that she seemed suffering from severe exhaustion. He noted the welts on her wrists. Later he inspected her clothing and shoes and identified the shoes with those which made the tracks he had trailed in Mexico. With reference to

the shoes, Cross would testify in October at the preliminary hearing that they appeared to have been cleaned up, perhaps polished on the soles, for when he first studied them they showed greater signs of wear!

Cross got his answers from Mrs. McPherson on Wednesday, but did not venture back into the Mexican desert until the next morning. This trip with Folsom Moore and George Spear evidently eventuated in some sloppy reporting by the press. Cross was puzzled a few days later when he learned that newspapers were captioning accounts that he was doubtful of Mrs. McPherson's story with headlines like, "Cross Puzzled" (e.g., *Los Angeles Times*, June 26, 1926). Twenty-three years later, Lately Thomas would resurrect the discredited attribution of skepticism without reporting that Cross decisively denied it under oath. Cross didn't say he was misquoted. He insisted he had said nothing of the kind at all. Lately Thomas quoted Cross as saying, "I do not know of an adobe house such as the one described by Mrs. McPherson within a hundred and fifty miles of Agua Prieta, and I know every house in this vast area" (*op. cit.*, p. 84). When Deputy District Attorney Murray cross-examined the tracker, asking if he had said anything to that effect, Cross snapped, "No." He added a question or two later, "I never made any such remark as that." Cross also denied, under cross-examination, contemporary reports which Lately Thomas did not mention, that he had said, "That woman is a damned good liar," referring to Mrs. McPherson. He denied telling anybody he doubted the authenticity of the evangelist's story. Cross thereby laid to rest rumors concerning his attitude toward the evangelist's account of her ordeal.

Cross, by the way, appeared at the preliminary hearing at considerable personal sacrifice. He had wanted to avoid the trip to Los Angeles because it interfered with his campaign then in progress — indeed nearing its climax — for the office of Chochise County Sheriff. J.A. McDonald, the

incumbent candidate, did not come to testify against Mrs. McPherson. Some Arizonians wondered whether Cross might have nosed out George R. Hinshaw, who won the race on the first Tuesday of November, if he had stayed home to electioneer in the closing month of the campaign. But he came to testify because Mrs. McPherson's attorneys felt they needed him. Sentiment in Douglas ran heavily in the evangelist's favor throughout the long case. Interestingly enough, the prosecution would subpoena only one witness from Douglas, Murchison, against Sister, but the defense would call about ten.

C.E. Cross also set the record straight concerning the relationship of Mrs. McPherson's footprints and fresh auto tracks found on the Mexican road on Wednesday morning. Innuendoes spread to the effect that the physical evidence indicated that Mrs. McPherson's footprints here were made when this mystery car let her out at the spot before turning around to go back to Agua Prieta. Lately Thomas was very careful not to state that the tracks led to the car or from the car or that Sister was ever in that auto, but if he does not imply such to be the case some readers have nevertheless inferred it from his report. Cross absolutely denied any connection between the auto tracks and Mrs. McPherson's footprints nearby.

C.E. Cross wouldn't be the only Douglas personage to be misrepresented or misquoted as skeptical of Sister's story. The *Douglas Dispatch*, which was quite friendly to the evangelist, carried two statements in one issue which attracted forthright contradictions. One reported that Police Chief Bowden had let down in his efforts, intimating that he had no faith in Mrs. McPherson's account anymore. Bowden denied making the statement and told a local clergyman, "You tell Mrs. McPherson that we are continuing our efforts here without any let down in prosecution of search for the cabin." A tracker named Hayhurst also was quoted as saying he did not expect to find the cabin. "I did not say that,"

Hayhurst contradicted hotly. "I said that I did not expect to find it on the west side of Niggerhead (mountain), but that I did expect to find it on the east side of Niggerhead."

A baseball player, named Hal Chase, got into the rumor factory too. Reports spread that Chase and others identified Mrs. McPherson as a woman upon whom a local doctor, named Weeks, performed an abortion. Both Chase and Weeks denied the allegations. The abortion fiction would surface again at Carmel-by-the-Sea in August and command considerable notoriety. One Los Angeles newspaper planned to have a physician examine the evangelist, but backed off when Rhode Island medical records were publicized proving that Mrs. McPherson had a hysterectomy more than a decade earlier.

The search party visited enough Mexican desert shacks in the area to give the lie to a statement Lately Thomas attributes to Police Officer Murchison that he knew of only three cabins in the whole area (cf. *op. cit.*, p. 70). Mrs. McPherson seriously considered the likelihood that one had been the captivity hut until, according to the Los Angeles *Times*, authorities pointed out it had a concrete floor. The *Times* added, "The cabin she said she was in had a dirt floor" (June 26, 1929, p. 2). The *Times* goofed there, for the evangelist had said it was a wooden floor. This detail would be the most vulnerable issue in her whole story, for no wooden floor shacks were located.

The question persists, "Could the evangelist's story be true and yet she be mistaken on this particular detail of observation? How many stories could be substantiated if absolute infallibility of observation were demanded?" Pedro Demandivo, chief of the Mexican Border Patrol, may have just been being polite when he commented after failing to find the shack, "Probably her hysterical condition caused her to fail to note carefully the cabin," but surely that probability is a strong possibility. Is it conceivable that a person exposed to such an ordeal as Sister described would become confused

about details and directions? Has that happened to anybody else?

Mrs. McPherson never changed her story that the shack had a wooden floor, but she did concede that she could have been mistaken after a subsequent expedition into the desert hunting for the hut. She gave her impression to the grand jury hearing that the place seemed more like a temporary camping outfit than a permanent building. She recalled being asked upon emerging from another shack on that occasion what kind of a floor it had. "Wooden," she said, whereupon her escorts took her back inside and showed her she was wrong. The floor was hard-packed dirt "smoothed and hardened with some preparation they have."

The Friday search turned up no hut, but the day didn't pass without excitement. Mrs. Kennedy complained that Cline and Ryan seemed more interested in chumming with reporters and posing for photographers than in seriously studying footprints or searching for shacks. At one point, Ryan spied a bull and left the car to chase it down and have his picture taken with it. The bull ran away. When C.E. Cross would mention the incident at the preliminary hearing, Prosecutor Murray virtually accused him of introducing the issue at the instruction of Sister's attorneys, an allegation he strenuously denied, claiming his recital was responsive to the questionings. Sometime after this run in with the bull, an unsigned poem arrived at Angelus Temple, spoofing Ryan. The "bard" burlesqued:

*"There's a wise old bull on the Mexican plain,  
But he left in a hurry and didn't explain,  
For Deputy Ryan, pompous and grand,  
Tried to pose, alongside, on the desert sand;*

*"I imagine that bull, to himself, just said,  
'Be seen beside him! Why I'd rather be dead!'  
So he took to his heels and got him away,  
And that picture has not been made yet, today."*



When the posse arrived back in Agua Prieta after the fruitless hunt for the hut, the Presidente (Mayor) of the town, Ernesto Boubion, insisted on a private interview with Mrs. McPherson. The only other person he would permit to be present was an American, William Appel, who would act as interpreter. The stories of Boubion and Sister concerning that interview disagree materially. Boubion claimed he told the evangelist that the investigations of Agua Prieta Police Chief Sylvano Villa and other Mexican authorities failed to substantiate her story. According to Boubion, the evangelist begged him not to make public those reports. However, Mrs. McPherson insisted the Presidente solicited a bribe. She gave his proposition in these words: "Mrs. McPherson, I have been offered five thousand dollars by some people to give a written statement that I do not believe your story of kidnapping and desert experience to be true. Now I need the money, but I have no particular desire to hurt you. If you could see your way clear to — oh, probably pay me as much as I have been offered, I am sure I would find it convenient to give a statement just the opposite to what they want — that is, that your story is true and that I am convinced of it." (*op.cit.* p. 171).

Mrs. McPherson said she walked out of the cafe where the interview unfolded "hardly dignifying the swarthy plotter with an answer" (*ibid.*).

The interpreter William Appel backed up Mrs. McPherson's version, submitting an affidavit to that effect. However, because he was an ex-convict, authorities discounted his statement. Would they have credited it had it backed Boubion?

The search for the shack would go on indefinitely. Some of Sister's partisans suspected it had been dismantled and removed by the kidnappers once they returned to find their captive had escaped. From time to time headlines blared that the shack had been found, that the evangelist had identified photographs of it, and the like, but the reports proved

unfounded. Letters arrived at Angelus Temple with drawings and descriptions purporting to represent the captivity hut, but they proved false leads. A. B. Ball of Mesa, Arizona sent a communique which claimed the Associated Press had purchased photos of the actual shack for \$2,000 from a free lance photographer, then suppressed them. Mr. Ball requested that his allegation be kept out of the newspapers.

When Mrs. McPherson got back into Douglas from the Mexican desert, she chaffed at growing expressions of disbelief in her story. She peremptorily rejected an offer from Hollywood to appear in a movie about herself. She also rejected offers of vaudeville appearances. Just the making of such offers fanned the flames of suspicion that the evangelist had disappeared as a publicity stunt. In Los Angeles her good friends, Judge and Mrs. Carlos Hardy rallied to her defense even before the rumor mill exploded. The Hardys, according to the dispatch in the *Express*, were not and had never been Baptist church downtown while his wife was a Congregationalist. "Our acquaintance with Mrs. McPherson was accidental," he said. "My wife and I went to Angelus Temple just to see the beauties of the new building. There we were introduced to the evangelist, and we so deeply were impressed with her sincerity and her devotion and her solemn faith in her mission that we accorded her our unstinted admiration and support."

Hardy declared forthrightly, "I do not believe that the kidnapping incident was a publicity measure. Mrs. McPherson needs no publicity," an observation which the coverage of her disappearance in comparison with her reappearance would seem to have confirmed. For the headlines which reported the former were just as huge as those which reported the latter. "Mrs. McPherson needs no publicity," Hardy asserted, "nor does she stand in need of anything which a less beloved and popular woman might have secured from a sensation." Hardy reminded that she was perfectly free to marry whom she liked.

"Was she weary?" Hardy continued, answering, "Her congregaton would have gladly given her any leave which she might desire, and she could have gone where she wished. The mere suggestion that she might have voluntarily disappeared is, I believe, unjust and cruel. If once the public lost faith in her it would, to my mind, be one of the greatest tragedies in American history."

Judge Hardy's wife confirmed her husband's assessment and insisted, "Yes, Mrs. McPherson was kidnapped. I believe it sincerely" (June 24, 1926, p.2).

In Douglas, prior to boarding the Friday night train for Los Angeles, the evangelist herself protested the accuracy of her account. She branded Sheriff McDonald's statement about her clothing as "untrue," insisting that her clothing was soiled when she reached civilization (Los Angeles *Times*, June 26, 1926, p. 2). And she issued a statement which the *Evening Express* in Los Angeles printed beneath a four-column wide caption: "AIMEE SWEARS KIDNAP STORY TRUE." The Associated Press dispatch commenced, "With a fervent prayer and in the name of her Creator, Aimee Semple McPherson this afternoon declared that "every word that I have uttered about my kidnapping and escape is true. Before the God in whom I have every faith and utter belief," she swore her veracity. She continued, "If I have been unable to answer any question propounded by a score of newspaper men, detectives, attorneys, friends — even my own mother — I have told them, "I do not know," or "do not remember." My story is true. I have permitted every reporter to ask any questions and where I know the answer I gave it!" (p. 1, June 25, 1926).

## CHAPTER 9

# Identification

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Southern Pacific's Golden State Limited steamed out of Douglas about 9:15 on Friday, June 25, hauling a special car which Sister and Mother expected was just for the family, but reporters and Cline and Ryan overran it. The newsmen continued demanding interviews. Mrs. McPherson pleaded to be permitted to rest, but in vain. Cline and Ryan questioned her, conferred with reporters who filled out telegraph blanks and wired dispatches from the train, then questioned her again.

The Los Angeles officers advised Mrs. McPherson that two Tucson men had tentatively identified her as a woman they saw on the street there just a few days previously. "Please be ready to meet the two men," they instructed her. When she objected that the train wouldn't reach Tucson until after midnight, they persisted in demanding she face the pair. If she didn't, they hinted, the reporters might conclude that she had something to hide.

Some distance out of Douglas the evangelist had her first opportunity to be alone with her mother. Mrs. Kennedy was

grim. "My dear," she confided, "I have been with the reporters, and they are not going to believe your story. You are in for trouble."

The first "witness" who boarded the train at Tucson afforded no trouble. He took one look at the evangelist and announced, "I am mistaken. I have never seen this lady before. I am sorry to have disturbed you, madam."

B. P. Greenwood, a Tucson building inspector, after flashing what the evangelist called was "a brief glance" at her, blurted, "Sure! I have seen her before. She looks like the woman I saw walking on the street." He specified the date as four weeks earlier.

Reporters made a mad dash to transmit the identification over the telegraph wire. Greenwood insisted on the identification, stating that if the woman he saw was not Mrs. McPherson, it was her twin sister. He admitted the woman had a hat low over her face at the time. Cline and Ryan made no attempt to cross-examine Greenwood. It was up to Mrs. McPherson to question him.

Greenwood, however, was not subpoenaed to testify against Sister in the preliminary hearing, because by that time the theory of the prosecution was that the evangelist was at Carmel or elsewhere in northern California at the period the Tucson witness claimed he saw her.

The surfacing of this first of many "identification witnesses" affords opportunity to point out that personal identification testimony, as Erle Stanley Gardner dramatized in the many Perry Mason cases, often betrays an inherent defect in the processes of human memory and in police procedure as well. The public entertains the fiction that eyewitness identifications represent the best form of testimony and evidence, while the facts blare that such evidence is really responsible for more miscarriages of justice than any other kind. Some people have accurate memories for faces and some witnesses do not. And there's no way to establish expertise in individual witnesses. And

some people react to the pressures of cross-examination by intensifying their insistence on their stories. They become more opinionated than ever. Supposing themselves to be honest witnesses who will not allow themselves to be flimflammed by argumentative attorneys, they cement their testimony rigidly, reflecting more or less the attitude, "Don't confuse me with the facts, my mind is made up!"

The train resumed its route west from Tucson. Hours before the *Express* in Los Angeles had screeched in two-and-one-half inch high headlines: "M'PHERSON DEATH THREAT: TRAIN HEAVILY GUARDED," and a smaller caption announced, "S.P. PULLMAN POLICE PLACED ON TRAIN TO BRING PASTOR TO L.A." The dispatch stated that the guards "all were armed to the teeth" (p. 1, June 25). They never needed to use their weapons. The attack on Mrs. McPherson was of a different nature than guns could defend.

The next morning, at every station where the train stopped, Captain Cline would knock at Sister's compartment and instruct her to come out and meet the multitudes who stood on the platforms. He asked her to introduce him to the crowds, and after she complied, he followed up, "Introduce Mr. Ryan."

"Headline fever" infected the Los Angeles *Express* as it boasted in its editions that it had scooped other Southland newspapers by arranging a broadcast by Mrs. McPherson on radio station K.N.X. (she insisted that her K.F.S.G. share the coverage) from the train at Colton at 12:45 p.m. Saturday. Remote broadcasting was relatively rare in those early years of radio, so the *Express* felt it could justifiably be proud of its arrangements. The day before an airplane chartered by the *Examiner* covered the distance between Los Angeles and Douglas in two hours and forty minutes flying time. That morning paper boasted about "this remarkable speed" accomplished by pilot Major C.C. Moseley, vice-president of Western Air Express, "one of the most intrepid aviators in the country." The dispatch continued, "Averaging well over 100

miles per hour, the plane made a non-stop flight." The trip back to Los Angeles took considerably longer, because "gasoline purchased in Douglas proved to be of an inferior grade and would not permit of the highest speed" (p. 3, June 25, 1926). We've come a long, long way in technology since 1926!

The railroad route into Los Angeles proved almost to be a parade for the evangelist, a triumphal entry into the city where for three-and-one-half years she had pastored Angelus Temple and preached almost daily over radio K.F.S.G.

Even at stations where the train did not stop, people crowded the platforms hoping to catch a glimpse of the famous passenger or demonstrate their support and admiration. "It was not only at the towns that the people were waiting," the *Examiner* on Sunday would publish the dispatch by its correspondent on the train, "They came from the ranches along the line, from the little farms, from the packing plants, to gather in eager groups and wave their welcome." According to the *Examiner*, by the time the train reached Colton every Los Angeles radio station, and not just K.N.X. and K.F.S.G., had horned in on the broadcast. Stations in outlying cities also carried Sister's words.

More than three thousand crowded the station at Colton. "Freight cars waiting on other tracks had their roofs lined with men who clambered up the iron ladders," the *Examiner* reported. "Hundreds of automobiles, parked along the side of the station, were covered with people clinging to their tops."

As the train rattled to a stop, a messenger handed a telegram to the evangelist. The wire announced that a Douglas posse had located the captivity hut. "Oh, praise God," Sister exclaimed. But further investigation proved it was the wrong shack.

At Los Angeles' S.P. Depot an estimated 50,000 welcomers cheered the evangelist in what was — and still may be — the greatest greeting ever accorded a celebrity

coming to the city. Multitudes struggled to touch the evangelist's hand. "God bless you," she beamed. "Don't get killed just to see me. I'll always be at the Temple, you know."

The Fire Department band was on hand (Sister was an Honorary Fire Chief) as well as the Angelus Temple Silver Band and choir. A flower-deck chair was provided, and when Sister sat down the chair was carried to her car. "Mrs McPherson was almost crushed in the rush of the throngs," the *Examiner* story continued. "It was with great difficulty that the police and firemen kept her from being hurt." Sister told her solicitous guards, "They wouldn't hurt me. They wouldn't for the world; at least, not on purpose. How I love them all."

Sister could hardly wait to get into the main auditorium of Angelus Temple. "With brimming eyes I made my way down to the altars and fell upon my knees behind the pulpit where a thousand times I had stood and preached the gospel of Jesus Christ," she described. Organist Ester Fricke's hands were caressing the console. The *Record* of the night before had anticipated this musical welcome on the instrument Sister said she loved most of all inanimate things by running a four column photo of Ester Fricke — who would continue as head organist at the Temple until seven months before Mrs. McPherson's death in September 1944. The selection which impressed Sister most on that occasion was "When peace like a river attendeth my way. . . It is well with my soul." But the peace of that reunion with her flock soon was threatened by an unprecedented outburst of what the evangelist's followers called persecution.

## CHAPTER 10

# Grand Jury

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If Captain of Detectives Herman Cline had had his way, Mrs. McPherson would have gone directly to Ocean Park after her arrival in Los Angeles. Cline wanted her to rehearse her story about the abduction that very afternoon, pointing out the various places where she had been on May 18. Sister pleaded that she was too weary to attempt that excursion that day.

When the evangelist was ready to make the trip, Ryan and his wife, Cline, and a Los Angeles *Times* reporter called at the parsonage to pick her up. "I think I have never seen them without a *Times* reporter," Sister would tell her attorney, W.I. Gilbert, when she reviewed her story to him for the first time after retaining him to serve as her chief counsel for the preliminary hearing.

The party hurried to the beach, arriving at about 6 p.m. Mrs. McPherson pointed out where her tent had been pitched, described the course of her swims, indicated the spot where Steve and Rose accosted her, showed where Rose had left to run ahead to the car and tend the "baby,"

traced the route she and Steve followed to the vehicle, and led them to the place where the car had been parked. "Impossible," the investigators contradicted, pointing out that this was a "No Parking" zone. So vigorously did the authorities insist that the kidnap car couldn't have parked there that the evangelist wavered and allowed it "might have been across the street," but she still didn't think so. After all, cars have stopped at times in no parking zones! And the driver didn't leave the wheel.

Before long a huge crowd gathered, since people were beginning to recognize the pastor. Sister wanted to leave, but Cline wanted a picture taken of the evangelist at the auto. Of course, he was in the picture too. Mrs. McPherson told Gilbert, "At all times on the desert and after we returned home, Captain Cline would ask me to pose for a picture with him."

A few days after the return to Los Angeles, Sister and Mother entrained again for Douglas to join the search for the shack. They returned to Los Angeles without success. The furor about the disappearance of the special delivery stamp from the second ransom letter prompted Mrs. Kennedy to seek to study the first — "the Revengers" — handwritten missive which she had turned over to Cline. The Captain then broke the news to Mother that this letter had been "lost."

For several days Cline continued his profession of faith in the evangelist's story of the kidnapping when in contact with the Temple, while acting in a way which kept Sister suspicious that he was feigning. Then one day, as the evangelist told Gilbert, "Mr. Cline told me he thought it time for me to have an attorney." "What for?" she asked. Cline remarked that there was "this thundering about the grand jury" investigation of her story. This was attracting considerable attention and publicity at the time, for what reason Sister said she could not understand because, "I was giving Mr. Cline every bit of evidence I had." She asked if Cline had any particular attorney in mind. He replied, as she



quoted him to Gilbert, "If you get this attorney he will keep you out of trouble. It is Paul Skenk. It may cost you fifty thousand dollars but it is the thing to do."

The evangelist dismissed the idea as ridiculous and made no effort to contact the lawyer. But, she advised Gilbert, "Mr. Skenk called me on the telephone that night. He said he had been asked by Mr. C. to call. He wanted to talk about the case." Mrs. Kennedy, in a prepared statement which did not mention the attorney's name, confided that the caller "spoke as though he did not feel like coming to the top, but would work underneath. We were warned that had we done this we would have been in their hands as long as we lived." Mother did not identify the party issuing the warning, but most likely it was Judge Carlos Hardy who was dispensing legal advice —without remuneration — to Sister and Mother.

Both Mrs. McPherson and Mrs. Kennedy dated the outward change in Cline's attitude from the time of their refusal of his advice about an attorney. Mother complained, "It seemed to be over that matter that Captain Cline then took the angle of disbelieving Mrs. McPherson's story." And Sister herself told Gilbert, "From that time on Captain Cline turned. I am assured if I had gotten Paul Skenk there would have been no grand jury."

The evangelist found it expedient as the rumors and charges surfaced to protest her truthfulness. When the matter of her clothing continued to kindle comment, she earnestly lectured Captain Cline, "You know, if I had been a bad woman and had some motive, I would have faked this thing, wouldn't I? I would have walked through the brush and rolled down on the ground and torn my dress and scuffed up my shoes. That would have been the thing to do if one were faking." This protest seems irrefutable, the more so since there would have been plenty of time to work up a dilly of a story and performance if the kidnapping had not been *bona fide*.

As a grand jury hearing loomed more as a certainty, Mrs.

McPherson felt constrained to retain counsel. Roland Rich Wooley and Arthur L. Veitch became the harbingers of an eventual battery of high-priced talent who would mastermind the evangelist's defense, with unofficial advice from Judge Hardy.

After the grand jury in Los Angeles agreed to Asa Keyes' and Joe Ryan's request for an investigation, subpoenas were delivered summoning Sister, Mother Kennedy, Emma Schaeffer, Roberta and Rolf, and other Temple personnel, besides Hollenbeck, who had been dragged into the case on the strength of an "identification" by Tucson auto dealer C.A. Pape who alleged he saw the evangelist in the company of Hollenbeck leaving the International Cafe, a roadhouse in Agua Prieta, Mexico, five days before she reappeared. Why didn't he blow the whistle then? The county grand jury also "invited" Mexican and Douglas officials to testify at the hearing scheduled to commence on July 8.

There was some speculation that the Temple witnesses would decline to honor the subpoena. Mother Kennedy called a powwow which included her daughter, the two attorneys, and Judge Hardy. Rumor had it that another conferee at the caucus was H.H. Kinney, the secretary to Los Angeles' Mayor Cryer, but this was never confirmed nor denied by any of the other participants.

Judge Hardy carried the most weight of any of the advisers, and he strongly recommended compliance with the subpoenas, advising that the best policy would be to tell everything, an opinion Mrs. McPherson shared though she did not relish the appearance. Veitch agreed. Wooley and Mother thought otherwise, but Hardy's position prevailed. About 10 a.m. on July 8, Sister in Temple uniform, surrounded by an honor-guard of women workers similarly garbed, entered the Hall of Justice. Many witnesses to this entrance had difficulty picking out the evangelist in the cluster, and newspaper photographs identified her with an arrow.

The evangelist submitted to interrogation by Keyes and

Ryan. Her testimony would months later be read into the record of the preliminary hearing. When her attorney Gilbert heard this transcript then for the first time, he exploded in the courtroom, "I have been here at the bar twenty-five years, and I have heard something today enough to turn everybody's hair gray, the District Attorney with Mrs. McPherson before the grand jury and clubbing her while she was there," a protestation which brought from Deputy D.A. Dennison the defense that the prosecutor's office had been criticized for going too easy on the evangelist!

Even Lately Thomas seems to have been appalled by the July 8 proceedings. He wrote, "Almost from the start, the alert, studiously polite, and cleverly suspicious prosecutors diverged from the events of the kidnapping as she told them to fish in the grab-bag of public conjecture, rumor, and scandalous innuendo. Mrs. McPherson was before the grand jury as the injured party, asking for the simple justice of indictment of her abductors, whoever they might be. Under the urbane and relentless probing of the district attorney, she was almost jockeyed into the position of a defendant." That author reported Keyes' and Ryan's failure to discredit the evangelist, continuing, "almost, but never quite, for the prosecutors were opposed by a will stronger than their own — the will of a woman who knew just what she wanted to say, and would not be led astray" (pp. 122-123, "The Vanishing Evangelist"). Her story was the only story of the event that never changed.

Keyes dredged up baseless rumors, like, "Mrs. McPherson, it has been stated to me on several occasions that, to use the expression we used to use, that you were run out of Denver at one time. Is there anything to that?"

Sister seemed dumbfounded by that allegation. She had nothing but the best to remember about the Mile High City. "Oh, no," she denied. "The mayor was on the platform at almost every service when I was last in Denver, and I might refer you to the mayor and to the business firms there and to

Judge Ben Lindsey, who is nationally known. And when I left, they gathered washbaskets of roses and poured them in the room until I was ankle deep in roses."

The District Attorney then repeated — or did he create it? — another rumor that Sister had been run out of a town in northern California. He couldn't remember what town. "I have forgotten," Keyes commented, "whether it was Oakland or some other place." Sister denied this. Keyes then inquired whether it was Fresno. "No," Sister replied and offered to submit documentation of her acceptance by those communities.

Keyes next brought up press reports that Mrs. McPherson was planning to take a world speaking tour and suggested, "One of the reasons that you might have for pulling a stunt like this is for the purpose of getting worldwide advertising or publicity for the sake of helping you in your work." The evangelist denied that she was planning an international itinerary at the time and insisted she would not have needed any such sensational publicity. Before she was kidnapped she already had invitations to Sweden and Denmark and for a return engagement to England. She recited details of her meetings in Belfast and London's Royal Albert Hall, where she addressed 10,000 earlier in 1926.

One of the grand jurors suggested the question of how much money Sister got for her lectures in London. The evangelist responded, "I never charge for lectures. It is on the freewill offering plan." To the best of her recollection her love offering in London was about one hundred pounds sterling (then \$500).

The preceding questioning took place after the grand jury accorded Mrs. McPherson an opportunity to make a lengthy statement in her own behalf. Lately Thomas reported Joe Ryan's attitude while she spoke: "Ryan's dark eyes snapped aggressively: histrionics!" That author hinted that the questioning which followed, regarding run-outs from Denver, Oakland, and Fresno and suspicion of a stunt to

publicize a world tour represented Asa Keyes' efforts to break the spell and undo the favorable impression Sister's remarks made on the grand jury (p. 132, *op. cit.*). Before her statement, Keyes and Ryan had interrogated her about a host of matters, some pertinent and some impertinent.

Keyes asked, "Describe to the jury the country you passed through," meaning on the desert trek after escaping from the captivity shack. "It was not a rough country that would chop your shoes off by any means," Sister responded, then scored with a reference to Ryan. "As Mr. Ryan himself said, he could walk two days on it without his commissary shoes being marked." Ryan had made that comment on his initial sortie into the desert on Friday, June 25. The witness conceded, however, "But I did stumble on stones as I journeyed."

"Question: Well, was it composed of sand, decomposed granite?

"Answer: Both.

"Question: Dust?

"Answer: No, deep sand. There was lots of dust on the road.

"Question: Small rocks and pebbles?

"Answer: Yes. Would you call it shale I think that is what I would call it, sort of shale.

"Question: Was it hard?

"Answer: Yes.

"Question: Brush interspersed between the boulders?

"Answer: Yes, there would be a cactus here and sagebrush yonder."

Keyes also broached the subject of Sister's hair, though what that matter had to do with the case bewildered many. This was before the "Hoax Woman," that whirlygig of lying, Lorraine Wiseman-Sielaff, surfaced with her story that the evangelist's hair was piled up with switches and that Sister coached her to affect the same hairdo with her switches. "Is that hair that you have in sight all yours?" the D.A. demanded.

The witness answered, "Yes." Keyes manifested doubt, cross-examining, "You don't wear a switch?" Mrs. McPherson said, "No."

Speculation, however, would continue rampant concerning the evangelist's hair until in open court, during the preliminary hearing, she gave at her attorney's command a demonstration which ended all doubts.

When Joe Ryan had a chance to question Mrs. McPherson he tried to connect the corset she wore in from the desert with those the evangelist habitually used. "Now, isn't it a fact, Mrs. McPherson, that the kind that you did get, which is a Bon Ton corset, is similar to the kind, character and description, weight and quality to the kind you ordinarily use?" he inquired.

"It could not be more different, positively, absolutely different in every way," she countered. The corset Rose had secured for her was "such a corset as I would give to my little daughter to wear to school. I wear a long one." She protested, though continuing interrogation on the subject, "I never wore anything like that" except during her captivity and escape.

Ryan attacked from a different direction. "Did you, at any time prior to your kidnapping have any trouble with Miss Schaeffer?" (her secretary).

"No."

"Did you ever state to Miss Schaeffer that you were going to discharge her?"

"No."

"And she stated back to you in reply that you didn't dare discharge her; that the information and knowledge that she had would blow up the Temple, if she should —"

Mrs. McPherson interrupted indignantly, "Never, Miss Schaeffer is like one of our family."

Getting nowhere on that line Ryan pressed, "Did you have any trouble with the ushers out there (at the Temple), "Mr. Bard, Saunders, Sexall, or any of those people?"

"I had a little misunderstanding with some of the ushers,

yes. Nothing of a serious nature; nothing; nothing more than comes up with any pastor," she said.

Ryan held on. "Let me ask you this question: Do you know of your own knowledge whether Mrs. Kennedy struck Mr. Saunders, one of the ushers, during this discussion?" The answer came, "Oh, I never heard of such a thing." She dismissed as impossible Ryan's suggestion that perhaps these ushers "could plan to perpetrate anything," presumably meaning the kidnapping. Mrs. McPherson volunteered that she thought they had fewer dissensions at Angelus Temple than "any church I have ever been in."

Asa Keyes sought admission of disagreements in another quarter: "What had been the relation between you and Mrs. Kennedy just prior to your disappearance, Mrs. McPherson."

"Answer: The same as they always have been, deepest love and confidence.

"Question: Is she your mother?

"Answer: Yes.

"Isn't it a fact — Well, I won't put it that way. I will ask you the question. Is it a fact or is it not a fact that you and Mrs. Kennedy for some time before your disappearance had been having a great many difficulties over financial matters in connection with the Temple?

"Answer: Absolutely never; no difficulties whatever, let alone finances.

"Question: Well, we won't limit it to finances. Had you been having difficulties over anything?

"Answer: No Sir, absolutely not. Mother and I were never more in love with each other.

"Question: Than you were at the time you disappeared?

"Answer: Yes.

"Question: The night before you disappeared you hadn't had any quarrel out there —

"Answer: (Interposing) Oh, no.

"Question: (Continuing) — over matters of any kind?

"Answer: No Sir.

"Question: Never had any words or dispute.

"Answer: No indeed.

"Question: Or disagreements?

"Answer: No.

"Question: Were you in any financial difficulty at the time?

"Answer: None whatever. My Temple is out of debt and radio and pipe organ and all these things have been completely paid."

Keyes next introduced the hotel rumors. "During the past year you have been in the habit, haven't you, Mrs. McPherson, of engaging suites of rooms around at different hotels on different occasions?" "Not suites, no," the evangelist denied. "Rooms?" inquired the D.A.. "Quite frequently while building the Bible Institute the sound of the steel riveter and the pouring of the cement which filled the air with dust caused my mother and my secretary to insist that in order to study my sermons that I get a quiet room, which I have frequently done," she explained. "We used to live in hotels for years while out preaching the gospel, as you know." She identified, at Keyes' request, hotels visited during the previous year as the Ambassador, the Rosslyn and the Alexandria. She had been to the Biltmore too, but not in the past year, so far as she could recall.

It is an incontrovertible fact that every time the evangelist engaged a hotel room throughout this period she signed the register with her own name, Aimee Semple McPherson. Others connected by rumor with the case used aliases more often than not, but she never did.

Sister reiterated that her purpose in these hotel residencies was to find a place to pray, study, and rest, but particularly study. "At half-past seven our telephone rings insistently and our doorbell rings, and there are constant demands, and the grating of the concrete and concrete mixers and riveters," she declared.

Keyes introduced Ormiston's name to the hearing, eliciting information that the radio man had worked at the Temple for about two years or so before resigning. "Did you ever talk to his wife?" the prosecutor questioned. Sister offered a lengthy description of this acquaintance:

"I first met Mrs. Ormiston under peculiar circumstances; Mr. Ormiston had disappeared from our radio department, leaving us with no operator. I came to go on the air, broadcasting my morning prayer service for the hospitals and recognized and found that they were dead, and so, of course, we began to inquire where he was, and got Mr. Hawkins, who is a friend of Mr. Ormiston's and recommended him to go and hunt him, and he asked at home, so his wife came down telling us that they had had some quarrels, that they had quarreled frequently, and that he had left home and that she was going back to Australia, and brought a letter from Mr. Ormiston explaining their difficulties, *et cetera*. And soon after that Mr. Ormiston returned looking very bedraggled, and like he had been through a siege of sickness or something. We brought them both in our house, and she was quite determined to leave him, but we had prayer with them, told them the serious step they were taking and to by all means hold the home together, and finally they kissed and made up. That was how I first met Mrs. Ormiston, and then she told me how lonely she was, her people were all across the sea, and that she thought that people slighted her, no one paid any attention to her because she was not a professing Christian. I tried to do all that I could to be a friend to her. She gave me little gifts even, little presents, and I gave her little gifts. We had lunch together a couple of times, and a dish of ice cream. That would be about the size of our friendship."

Mr. Keyes questioned, "Well, did she ever intimate to

you, Mrs. McPherson, that the reason she was having domestic difficulties was that she was claiming — whether true or false — that Mr. Ormiston was too friendly with you?"

"No," Mrs. McPherson insisted. "There is — you mean with her leaving home at that first time?" Keyes stipulated, "At any time." The evangelist answered, "Oh, not at all. I hardly had spoken to Mr. Ormiston, hardly knew him at that time."

Further questioning brought another lengthy answer concerning contacts with the Ormistons:

"One evening I wrote a letter to Mr. and Mrs. Ormiston stating how very careful I always had to live at the Temple, never having even walked up the rampart with anyone except a couple of ladies, and Mrs. Ormiston had invited me out to their house for dinner; something I very rarely do is to go to any of our parishioners, but I had gone to this one little dinner which she had asked for so long, and after dinner Mr. and Mrs. Ormiston and myself, at their suggestion, had gone over to see a new radio station which Mr. Ormiston had installed at Warner Brothers, and went on later for a little dish of ice cream somewhere near there at a little ice cream parlor, and someone had seen me. I cannot move anywhere without someone recognizing me, and this had been commented upon, and I heard three different things. 'Well,' someone said, 'Sister McPherson has Mr. Ormiston on the platform with her.' And I had also heard Mr. (Gladwyn) Nichol's name — he is the man who plays the cornet. My mother asked him to lead the singing quite a little bit. And someone says, 'I saw Mrs. McPherson and a man and a girl out at this place,' and I was worried about it, because I have prided myself perhaps as every woman does on my name and character and defied anyone to put their finger on anything in my life that would be the least shadow of doubt — pardon me on that — so I wrote this letter, and explained how careful I must be, and I

know that then Mrs. Ormiston, instead of laughing at it as I would have, acted in a peculiar manner, and she said, 'Well, you know my husband is kind of flighty — that was her term; she said, 'He smiled at a girl who put cream in his coffee the other night.' She thought he was a little that way, but I just smiled it off and thought nothing more of the matter until later something was said, but I understand as to my being mentioned in any connection by Mrs. Ormiston, she denies that, and that must be a mistake, and I have seen that on very, very good authority, and we have a letter very recently from Mrs. Ormiston, a very friendly letter thanking me for all my interest and kindness."

Eighteen pages later in the transcript of the grand jury testimony of Mrs. McPherson, Joe Ryan interrogated concerning Ormiston. "Did you receive," he asked concerning the period the evangelist was in Europe and the Holy Lands, "any communication from Mr. Ormiston?" "Oh, no," Ryan inquired, "Would you say that you did not call him on the 22nd day of November, 1925, at the Rosslyn Hotel?" He meant while Sister was staying there. She replied, "I have no recollection," but conceded "it might be possible," since she habitually carried a small radio with her wherever she went in order to monitor the radio station. "It might be such a thing — I cannot recall at the moment, but it might be if 10:30 came, and if there was nothing coming in (from K.F.S.G. over the air) — I might have called up and asked why we were not on the air."

Ryan returned to Ormiston a few minutes later, asking about \$1500 allegedly wired to the radio man from "James Wallace" (the name of Sister's long dead half-brother) in Venice. Ormiston denied ever receiving this wire in Seattle whither it was sent. He himself and some woman had registered at the same hotel from which the money was wired as "Mr. and Mrs. James Wallace of Glendale" some weeks before the March 15 date of the telegram. Mrs. Wallace could

not have been the evangelist, because she was overseas from mid-January to late April, and she could thus hardly have sent any telegraphic money order from Venice, California. But Ryan tried to connect her with that and other transactions, asking, "Did you send in any form or fashion or by any means any sum of money to Mr. Ormiston in Seattle or any other point north of Los Angeles?" Sister answered, "No sir." Ryan persisted, "Never, at any time?" She replied, "To begin with, I could not possibly get hold of money like that. I received for spending money \$25 a week." She added that she also had "a little \$500 bank account" which had been inactive for some time.

Ryan pressed incredulously, "You don't handle the finances?" to which she responded, "I don't handle the finances, no. If I want any money they give it to me like a child."

Ryan next queried about the alleged travels with H.D. Hollenbeck, the contractor of the Bible School building next to the Temple. Earlier testimony had established that Sister had ridden with Hollenbeck to meetings in California, but never traveled alone with him. Mrs. Hollenbeck, Mrs. Kennedy, or Miss Schaeffer always went along. "Now there are several people," Ryan proceeded, "who say that they saw you — that is, Mrs. McPherson — across the line in Agua Prieta on Monday, June the 21st, in a car with a man who answered to the description of Mr. H.D. Hollenbeck. Is that true or not true, Mrs. McPherson?" She answered, "Untrue." "Were you there by yourself?" Ryan questioned. The answer came, "No." She reminded, "I have given a complete statement of my whereabouts." Ryan elicited a denial also that Sister had been in Tucson at the time witnesses alleged they saw her there.

One of the grand jurors, when opportunity afforded, wanted to know, "Mrs. McPherson, did you ever hear or have knowledge of one or two men being drowned in trying to find your body at Ocean Park?" "No, I haven't," the evangelist



informed. That wasn't the answer the juror expected. Another query followed, "You know nothing about a deep sea diver being drowned or losing his life?" Mrs. McPherson recalled, "Someone said something to me," then turned to the deputy district attorney and inquired, "Was it you, Mr. Ryan, at one time?" Ryan replied, "I started to ask you, and your mother looked at me, and I didn't ask you." The evangelist commented, "That is what is supposed to have occurred." Sister responded, "I am very sorry if it is true."

On that melancholy note the grand jury testimony of Mrs. McPherson ended. But sometime earlier the jury allowed her to make a somewhat lengthy statement which is material to the issues:

"I have tried to confine myself just to the questions, but I have had it on my heart all day that I would like to speak a word. I didn't know whether I would have the privilege to speak again, and I want to say that I realize that this story may sound strange to many of you, may be difficult for some of you to believe. It is difficult for me, sometimes, to believe; sometimes it seems that it must be just a dream. I would to God that it was; that I could wake up and pinch myself and know that it was not true. I realize that, and whether that was a part of the plan of it all, I want to say in my own behalf — I want to say if character counts a little and if a person's past life counts a little, then I want you to look back. Our family has a family of ministers on both sides. My mother gave me to God before I was born. My earliest training has been in Bible and religious work. As a little child I lined the chairs up and preached to them as early as five years of age, and gave my testimony. I was converted at 17, married an evangelist, preached the gospel in my humble way at home and then sailed for China, never expecting to come back to this land, but willing to give my life for Jesus. They buried my precious husband there. I came back with my little

baby in my arms, born a month after her father died. I took up the Lord's work again as soon as I was able to go on. I have had no great denominations back of me, but have been inspired only by my love for God and my love of the work, and of this precious Word, but I began very humbly.

"Now, until this crushing thing that none of us can explain why even God would permit, although we cannot question like that — it would be wrong to do that — before that came I was on the pinnacle of success as far as my work for God was concerned, but I have not always been there. I began preaching to farmers, ranchers, under the trees to farmers in their blue overalls sitting on the grass and using the piazza as a mourner's bench. From there, with the \$60 that came in the collection, I bought a little tent, a poor little tent very full of holes, and from that I saved my money and bought a bigger one, and that has been the history.

"I have never put my money in oil wells or ranches or even clothes or luxuries. My great thought has been always — and this can be absolutely proven — for the service of the Lord and my dear people. I am not saying this in any unkindness, but I would rather never have been born than to have caused this blow to God's Word and to his work. I had rather I had never been born or have seen the light of day than that the name of Jesus Christ, whose name I love, should be crucified and people would say, 'There is Sister; she has been preaching, and if her story is wrong' — that is the sad part to me, not only my children should go through life and people say, 'See what her mother did,' but the blow to my work is the greatest thing.

"The turn in my career came at the International Camp given at Philadelphia. I could bring to you, I believe, hundreds of thousands of letters and telegrams over the route from friends in different cities, and during all those years no one has ever said that

they saw me out with a man, nor never has my name been linked in any way with anyone like that. I don't believe that I have told lies or cheated or done anything that people could put their finger on.

"I traveled for two years with a tent. I drove my own stakes, patched the tent and tied the guy ropes almost like a man. And then came the time when we began to get bigger buildings and theatres and buildings costing sometimes as much as \$100 a day in buildings where I have preached to as many as 16,000 in a day.

"Then came the building of Angelus Temple. I came here to a neighborhood that had no special buildings in it, got a piece of land and hired horses and scrapers and bossed the men myself and went out to build the foundation myself with a little capital. I told people my dream to preach the gospel as God had given it to me, and they came to me to help me, not here, but from other cities through the 'Bridal Call,' my magazine. I have been here for years. I have visited the jails. We have workers in the penitentiary. We have appeared at almost every bedside we could reach in the county hospital, and at the county farm we journey each week to gather the old folks and preach for them. We preach at the shops and factories to men at noon. We have never turned anyone away but give free food and clothes. And my life, I feel, has been lived in a broad spotlight.

"Naturally, I have preached a gospel which made some enmity. I have gone unmercifully after the dope ring, gambling, liquor, tobacco, dancing, and made the statement that I would rather see my children dead than in a public dance hall. I have perhaps laid myself open to enmity in those lines about evils in the schools, et cetera, but in everything, I have tried to live as a lady and as a Christian, and I just want one more thought — it is so kind of you to grant me this opportunity. It does mean so much. I will feel happier for having said it. The thought is that one should doubt

my story. Perhaps you are skeptical; I don't blame anyone, because it does sound absurd, but it did happen, ladies and gentlemen.

"Suppose one should doubt it; a trained investigator, it would seem to me, would need but look for a month, so would I get by? As one said who was here at this moment, they couldn't think of any other reason than that I might be insane. I would not work with one hand for seventeen years, and just as I saw my dearest dreams coming true, sweep it over, and not only that, but attempt to heal little babies in Christ who were too weak to stand.

"Motive? If I were sick — someone said, 'Maybe she went away to rest' — but it was not that; I had just passed an examination for life insurance a while ago and they said I passed 100 percent.

"Amnesia? It could not be that I am willing to have my mind examined or any test that could be put on that.

"And as for falling in love, I am in love with the work I do.

"There might be a baser motive. I almost blush to mention it in the jury room, but some might think of it. They say the waters of the mind are like the waters of the sea, that cast up strange things, and that I might be in trouble of some sort, and had to go away and come back. I would like to say, although I apologize for having to mention such a thing, that I had a thorough examination upon coming home, although that was not necessary, as the history of my case for twelve years back would show that such a thing would be absolutely out of the question."

Earlier Mrs. McPherson had given to Captain Herman Cline and others the name of the physicians who treated her after the birth of her son. But the abortion slander would not die until a newspaper confirmed her claims sometime later. Mrs. McPherson continued,

"Other motives, I can think of none. Had I gone away willingly, I would not have come back. Publicity? I don't need that. The Sunday before this happened to me my Temple was filled three times. Monday night it was filled. I can think of no other motive. And I pray — I don't need to ask that you will give me your most earnest consideration, and that you will pray about it on your knees, because it concerns the church and concerns Christ, and the eyes of the world are on a religious leader and upon this case, and people may come and say, 'I saw Mrs. McPherson here'; 'I saw her in a dance hall there'; 'I saw her in a saloon there.' Just take a look at me; look at my children and my family. Of course, that is one thing; I am powerless; my hands are tied. I don't fear the most rigid investigation of my story, for my story is true. The only thing I fear is — I don't say a frame-up, but mistaken identities, people who might be up here or there who might think so-and-so, but I don't think anything like that will be found to be true, and I would like to have you call me and ask me. And I do thank you for allowing me these few words."

On Tuesday, July 13, Mother Kennedy testified before the same grand jury, interrogated, as was her daughter, by District Attorney Keyes and Deputy Ryan, the latter of whom was now openly hostile to the evangelist's story, while his chief appeared only slightly less so.

Keyes attempted to wring from Mrs. Kennedy admissions of frictions between herself and her daughter, which when the mother emphatically denied the allegations, found the District Attorney subjecting the witness to virtual cross-examination. "Isn't a fact, Mrs. Kennedy, that you and Mrs. McPherson had many quarrels and quarreled shortly before the disappearance over money matters?" he demanded. Mother cooed sweetly, "I don't believe anybody could quarrel with Mrs. McPherson." Keyes countered, "Well,

I don't want to argue with you on that proposition, but I wish you would please answer my question." Mrs. Kennedy responded, "No, there was no quarrel over money matters, or anything else that I know of." About thirty pages later in the transcript this question surfaced again, as Mother was asked whether her relations with her daughter "have always been friendly." She replied, "Absolutely. I boss her around considerably and try to keep her from getting into trouble. If she would listen to me she would not have gotten into this, because I have already told her never to go with anybody unless she knew them very well." To her dying day Mrs. McPherson retained that childlike trust in people according to which she always took them at their face value and accepted them as they represented themselves. This trust, which some called gullibility, was responsible for getting her into most of her subsequent troubles.

When the questioner asked whether Mrs. Kennedy believed her daughter was "really kidnapped" — a query which could only enforce upon the grand jurors the fact that the District Attorney did not — Mother answered unequivocally, protesting her confidence in Sister's complete story. She also denied that there was a large mortgage on the Temple property and specifically repudiated the figure the District Attorney suggested, \$85,000. As a matter of fact, Angelus Temple at that time was debt free, as it had been since its dedication on January 1, 1923.

Mrs. Kennedy replied to interrogation over the alleged Memorial Fund that there was no such project, that every penny of the money contributed and pledged at the Memorial Service the Sunday before Mrs. McPherson reappeared was designated for the Bible School. Keyes remained skeptical, persisting, "It was not to be used in paying for the memorial to Mrs. McPherson?" Mother answered, "Not a penny of it, nor no suggestion of that kind ever made." Once a rumor gets started, it dies hard. Modern rehashes of the event keep the "monument" fiction alive.

One of the grand jurors had a question about another current rumor, "At workers' meetings shortly after the disappearance of Mrs. McPherson, did you not ask all the workers who did not believe Mrs. McPherson was in the ocean to lay aside their badges?" The form of the question solicited an affirmative, but Mrs. Kennedy decisively answered, "No," to that question and the follow up which simply re-phrased it.

Mrs. Kennedy confirmed her daughter's testimony concerning the reason for hotel registrations, adding some details. "We have had no home since Angelus Temple was built, so we have been sleeping in a building which was an administration building. Sister occupied one little room right now, and hearing all the building, hearing every telephone call, every ring at the door, as the walls are very thin, even speaking in an undertone, and we had planned to build for Sister, and had prepared to build on, but when we decided to have the Bible school we put that off, and we had arranged for Sister to spend whatever evenings she could — possibly Monday or Tuesday or whatever evenings she could — at what we considered the highest and best and safest hotels in the city, and when we sent her there we believed that she was in the best of care."

Mr. Keyes asked, "You have a secret phone out to your place there, have you not?" to which Mrs. Kennedy replied, "No, I don't think so. We have a phone — an unlisted phone, but I think everybody in town knows that number." Keyes continued, "What is the number? I don't know it?" Mother answered, "Dunkirk 1211."

Did Mrs. McPherson carry any life insurance? Mrs. Kennedy confided that a policy had been in force some time earlier for three months, but had been allowed to lapse. Keyes pressed, "At the time of her disappearance she had no life insurance at all?" The witness answered, "Not a penny, and I sure thank the Lord she didn't." The policy which had lapsed had been taken out because of a planned airplane trip

to a radio convention in San Francisco.

Mr. Keyes seemed incredulous that Mother could have truly believed her daughter had drowned and continued the way she did without collapsing. Mrs. Kennedy responded, "It was wonderful how I kept up. I could have gone to pieces right then, and had I been alone I would of (sic), but I realized that the great thing in our lives had been that work and if Sister was gone she had been given to me by the Lord and in answer to prayer, and if she were gone it was simply that I would have to tide over." Keyes tried to shake Minnie's insistence that she had believed Sister was dead. Mrs. Kennedy remained steadfast, insisting, "My belief in her being dead was so strong that nothing would thoroughly convince me until I heard her own voice over the phone."

The D.A. suspected some shenanigans relative to the withdrawal of the reward, "shortly before her reappearance," as he put it, although it was almost two weeks before that reappearance. Mrs. Kennedy admitted the reward had been withdrawn, but reminded Keyes, "That offer was made, as was stated in the press, not with the belief that it would bring any results, but believing that it would quickly quiet some of the many rumors that Mrs. McPherson had been seen here, there, and yonder." Keyes pressed, "Why" was the offer withdrawn? Mother answered, "On the advice of Captain Cline."

Throughout the long ordeal the record shows cooperation by the Temple with the authorities. Mother yielded to their entreaties about the reward, about furnishing questions to McKinley to pass on to Wilson and Miller, and about virtually every facet of the investigation, both before and after Sister's return.

A host of other witnesses followed Mrs. Kennedy in the hearing, most of whom appeared to attack the evangelist's story. I find no record of any witnesses from Douglas or Agua Prieta testifying. The Gonzales, who would have supported Mrs. McPherson's story, as they did later in the preliminary

hearing, told Reverend Howard of Douglas that the reason for their avoidance of the grand jury hearing could be explained in one word, "Boubion" — the Presidente or Mayor of Agua Prieta who was stating his disbelief in the evangelist's story. Mrs. McPherson had charged, and the interpreter at their conference, William Appell, had confirmed, that Boubion solicited a bribe to back her account. Howard also passed on to the Temple his absolute certainty that Hollenbeck was definitely in the Douglas-Agua Prieta area on the dates a witness claimed he saw Mrs. McPherson there in Hollenbeck's company. This was bad news to the Temple, but later Hollenbeck proved absolutely that he could not have been there at the time, which took some of the wind out of the sails of C.C. Pape.

Pape had owned an auto agency in Tucson. He studied pictures of Mrs. McPherson and concluded that he had seen her with Hollenbeck at the International Cafe in Agua Prieta on the night of June 20, the Sunday before Mrs. McPherson's reappearance. The circumstance that Mrs. McPherson did not frequent nightclubs or saloons — indeed, would not be caught dead in one (and Hollenbeck felt the same way) — did not deter Pape's identification. In the grand jury room he pointed a finger at the evangelist and accused, "That is the woman." The newspapers played up the identification big.

Hollenbeck denied the rendezvous before the grand jury. He submitted eventually to the District Attorney documentation which absolutely proved he could not have been at Agua Prieta any time near the date Pape put him there. Hollenbeck was able to list his whereabouts every single day of the period Mrs. McPherson was missing, and he spent all that time in California, as neighbors and associates confirmed. Hollenbeck thus refuted Pape, and if Pape was wrong about the man, he likely was wrong about the woman. Mrs. McPherson's lawyers located witnesses who alleged that Pape was drunk or nearly so at the time of the Agua Prieta "identification." But, of course, they could not get such

testimony before the grand jury. Neither could they get the testimony of Mrs. V.R. Umphrey before that panel. Mrs. Umphrey, whom investigation proved had no connection whatever with the Temple, submitted an affidavit insisting that she was the woman Pape had seen. However, there seemed to be some conflict of dates between her remembrance of the incident and Pape's.

Perhaps the grand jury's action would have been different if Ike Levy's testimony had been scrutinized. Pape's accusation did the evangelist irreparable damage before the panel, and she had no opportunity to cross-examine the auto dealer. No effort was made to shake his testimony. But on the 17th day of July, Ike Levy gave an affidavit which demolished completely Pape's identification. It is significant, that Pape was not a witness at the preliminary hearing. Levy swore:

"Ike Levy, being first duly sworn, deposes and says that he is a resident of the City of Douglas, County of Cochise, State of Arizona, residing at the Gardanier Apartments in said city; that he is the manager of the International Cafe situated in Agua Prieta, Sonora, Mexico; that he was present in said cafe all the afternoons and evenings of June 19th, 20th, and 21st, 1926; that as the manager of said cafe, it was his duty to, and he did, observe all of the patrons of said establishment; that on the 25th day of June, 1926, affiant made a special trip to the City Park, City of Douglas, as one of the persons who had been present in said cafe during the afternoon or evening of one of said days; that affiant knows of his own knowledge that at no time during said 19th, 20th, or 21st of June, 1926, was Mrs. Aimee Semple McPherson in the said International Cafe

Levy swore the affidavit and signed it before Notary Public B.G. Thompson, whose seal appears on the

document.

Meanwhile, Keyes and Ryan interrogated other purported "eyewitnesses" who claimed to have seen the evangelist at large during the period she professed she was in captivity. Police Captain and Mrs. Barnard of Culver City testified that they saw Mrs. McPherson in an automobile in Temple uniform, accompanied by another woman similarly attired, driving toward Los Angeles shortly after 3 p.m. on the day she disappeared. The grand jury did not hear witnesses who claimed to see her enter the surf some miles to the west half-an-hour or so after Barnard's sighting, nor did the jury investigate where Sister, if it had been she, had secured the Temple uniform. Nor did the grand jury hear available witnesses who swore by affidavits that when the evangelist left Angelus Temple she was wearing a white and yellow sports dress and carrying only bathing suit and cap and books. If the woman Barnard saw was Mrs. McPherson, Emma Schaeffer would have had to have been in on the alleged conspiracy. Since her simple temperament was such that she would have wilted under cross-examination if her story had not been the complete truth, we can absolutely eliminate the secretary of any complicity. But without her knowledge her employer could not have obtained a Temple uniform into which to change at the beach. And if the evangelist had been perpetrating an escapade, would she have dressed up in her typical costume? Moreover, who was the other woman in Temple uniform in the car Barnard said he saw?

The day after Barnard's testimony before the grand jury, Mrs. McPherson's attorneys turned over to the District Attorney's office an affidavit which, in their words, entirely explained the so-called appearance of Mrs. McPherson in an automobile passing through Culver City. Mrs. Alice A. Franck's testimony, the lawyers proclaimed, "entirely blows up testimony before the grand jury by Captain Barnard and Mr. and Mrs. Vick in which they positively identified Mrs.

McPherson as the woman they saw in the car. Wooley, Hanner, and Veitch conceded that these witnesses "may have been entirely conscientious in their beliefs and intended harm to no one," but added, "nevertheless, proof is proof." Mrs. Franck insisted that the Barnards had seen her and Irene Hillsbrom in the car concerning which they had testified.

In 1926 admiration for Mrs. McPherson on the part of many women members of Angelus temple and students in the Bible College caused them to affect a resemblance to the evangelist. They adopted her hair style. When she changed, they changed. They dressed identically. And those of similar size and features often were mistaken for the evangelist — as indeed happened on the first day of the grand jury hearing when several identified others in her escort as Mrs. McPherson. On any given afternoon in 1926 there were on the streets of the Los Angeles area a dozen — sometimes dozens — women wearing the white dress under a black cape which was the Foursquare uniform for ladies.

Meanwhile, another alleged identification grew ripe for rebuttal. Joe Ryan told the grand jury that Dennis Collins, a mechanic at a garage in Salinas, California, had positively identified the evangelist as the woman who accompanied Kenneth Ormiston when he had his car worked on in that establishment. Ryan volunteered to bring Collins to Los Angeles to testify to the grand jury and to face the evangelist and identify her in person. The Deputy District Attorney claimed that Collins identified in his presence a photo of the evangelist as being the woman with Ormiston. But Ryan had gone off half-cocked. From Salinas came heated denials by Collins that he had made the identification. Ryan stuck by his guns and claimed that the mechanic had. Collins' denials never got anywhere near the press coverage that Ryan's claim commanded, but the garageman noted on the backs of pictures of Mrs. McPherson subsequently that there was nothing about said pictures to make him believe Mrs.



McPherson was the woman with Ormiston. On one he stated Mrs. McPherson "does not resemble" that paramour. Collin asserted that Ormiston's woman looked considerably younger than the evangelist.

At the time Mrs. McPherson had her radio station, and she used it to good effect to get her story to the public, commanding a listening audience at times estimated to exceed one million throughout the state of California. However, radio reports do not tend to survive as do printed media, and the Los Angeles newspapers when they reported her remarks often distorted them, as comparisons with the stenographic records of the evangelist's sermons and "platform bulletins" indicate. So she was at a disadvantage somewhat in getting her story across. And the press did not always report her statements and those of witnesses and attorneys championing her cause. As one reporter told her, "Aimee good? That's no news. Aimee bad? Wow!"

So the derogatory material got before the grand jury with no chance for rebuttal. The press featured it, while burying much which substantiated the evangelist's story. Some of the grand jury testimony never did reach the public, particularly that by the blind lawyer McKinley and his secretary Bernice Morris. McKinley told Mrs. Kennedy and Mrs. McPherson and their attorneys that he gave the panel the same story he gave the Temple authorities, but there is no way to check this out. At any rate, it is hardly any wonder that the grand jury, when time came to vote, declined to issue an indictment against the kidnappers. The bias of the interrogators in the matters aired to the public appears so blatant that it is no wonder the grand jury bought their skepticism. Then Ryan had the gall to profess, "The evidence was presented to the grand jury absolutely from an unbiased viewpoint." This statement came from the man who had made up his mind that the evangelist was, as he put it later, "a fake and a hypocrite"! Ryan's bias was further betrayed by the continuation of his declaration, "The action of that body (the grand jury) explains

fully the weight of the evidence in this case."

But this brings up a question — which so far as I know was not discussed with reference to the case. The question is, how does a person prove he was kidnapped? What more evidence could a victim give than did Mrs. McPherson? The kidnappers could give themselves up, but that doesn't happen. The kidnappers could leave a trail which could lead to apprehension, but their goal would be to cover that trail. The authorities could capture the kidnappers, but no effort was ever made in that direction beyond a couple of weak feints out into the desert by the authorities of Los Angeles. No kidnappers would ever be arrested if the officers treated the stories of alleged victims in the manner they treated Mrs. McPherson's. How many investigations would get off the ground if the police told a complainant, "We don't believe that you were kidnapped. But if you prove that you really were, why then we'll look for the kidnappers"? There wouldn't even be any indictments!

So the fact that the grand jury did not indict any kidnappers affords no weight against the truth of Mrs. McPherson's story. Why didn't the grand jury indict? The District Attorney and his Deputy blatantly paraded their skepticism before the grand jury. No one can study the transcript of testimony without discerning their prejudice. Keyes and Ryan conducted most of the questioning, and absolutely they expended more effort to break down the evangelist's story than to indict kidnappers. When Attorney Gilbert heard the transcript for the first time he rebuked the District Attorney's office vehemently, "You were not looking for any kidnappers; you were trying to get testimony before the grand jury to base this complaint upon" — the complaint being the conspiracy charge against Sister and Mother. So irrefutable was the accusation that the District Attorney and his deputies did not even protest a denial of the charge at the time Gilbert made it in their presence in the preliminary hearing in Los Angeles' Municipal Court on October 1, 1926!

Sister's attorneys issued a statement also rebuking the authorities after the grand jury took no action against the kidnappers. "California, Arizona, and Mexico have been searched, not for the criminals, but for evidence against the evangelist. And after the combing, there is no such evidence. Mrs. McPherson's story, related time and again to officials and others, remains as firm and unshaken as the first time it was told."

But why would the authorities take such pains to discredit Aimee Semple McPherson? Could it have been her exposés of the underworld which was enjoying official "protection" in Los Angeles at the time? A few days before the grand jury vote, Ethel Coe stenographically recorded a statement by a Mrs. Jay who claimed she tried to lay a trap for crooked officials after her husband had been arrested for having three quarts of liquor in his possession. In two court trials which ensued, Joe Ryan, though prosecutor, did his best to get the defendants acquitted, Mrs. Jay charged. Her affidavit fills almost three legal size sheets of paper, double-spaced. If true, it is a sordid story implicating Ryan and Cline, and possibly even Keyes, in a protection racket.

Mrs. Jay alleged, "Captain Cline's sweetheart, Sadie Stager, runs a bootlegging joint in San Pedro. Two months ago she ran her place at 370 14th Street, San Pedro. Cline has kept company with her for years and she has told me many times that she was his sweetheart. She said that when Captain Cline makes enough money out of the Police Department they were going to Europe for a trip. She resides at the present time at 2644 Carolina St., San Pedro. Sadie Stager was so angry because we were getting the goods on Captain Cline that one day when my husband came out of the Hall of Justice she hit him in the ear with a piece of rock, cursed him and called him terrible names. She had previously bragged that she could do anything she pleased. We took this evidence to Prosecuting Officers and Judge Hann wouldn't do anything about it, proving that what she

said was true. I told him so in the presence of four people that were with me."

Of course, the reluctance of the authorities to follow up that complaint does not necessarily prove Sadie Stager's immunity or official protection. However, a subsequent event confirmed dramatically that Captain Cline was not averse to violating the Eighteenth Amendment. On Sunday, August 22, 1926 the Los Angeles detective was jailed for drunk driving in the suburb of Azusa. Cline had bumped with his police car a vehicle in front of him, inflicting slight damage. The policeman who investigated the accident arrested Cline. A sobriety test indicated he was drunk. He denied the drunkenness but admitted to having some drinks. He was suspended from duty as Captain of Detectives, thus ending all connection with investigation of the McPherson case. In future years his name made news over two more auto mishaps, when he crashed into a cafe and into a railroad sign.

Public discussion of the kidnapping case surged constantly, fed not only by reporters' dispatches but by letters to the press like that from a lawyer who claimed — whether sincerely or tongue-in-cheek is hard to discern — "I am satisfied I can prove from the oral testimony of the past few weeks that the city editors of the leading dailies combined and kidnapped Mrs. McPherson and staged her comeback so as to make copy." The case kept making copy. And the Reverend Bob Shuler found the case a bonanza for filling his Trinity Methodist Episcopal Church downtown. "Fighting Bob," who for decades ranted and raved against evils real and imagined in the Southland, attacked the evangelist unmercifully and chided the public officials over their "leniency" toward her. He conducted city-wide mass meetings aimed at discrediting Mrs. McPherson. Shuler would some years later lose the radio station he operated. The Federal Radio Commission canceled his license because of the vitriolic attacks he launched over the air against certain persons, like the evangelist. However, in time

Bob Shuler evidently came to accept Sister's story of her ordeal as the truth, for by the middle 1930's he was cultivating her friendship, while pursuing in other directions his stormy ways. After he retired from Trinity church he even preached at Angelus Temple! But that was following Mrs. McPherson's death. Too bad his change of heart didn't happen before he published his denunciatory diatribe, "McPhersonism," a book which attacked the evangelist not only over the kidnapping but over her doctrines.

One of the circumstances latched onto by individuals seeking to discredit Mrs. McPherson was the publicity concerning the "Dr. Merton" telegram received by Mother Kennedy a few days after her daughter's disappearance. This matter occupied the grand jury's attention to a considerable extent, especially when a handwriting expert working for the police testified that it had been scrawled by Kenneth G. Ormiston. Milton Carlson's testimony, however, was contradicted materially by a statement by Leslie Bland, the Oakland messenger boy with whom the sender filed the wire. The Los Angeles Evening *Herald* of July 15 did indeed report that Bland had identified the sender, according to Ryan, "positively" as Ormiston, but the next day's issue carried somewhat of a retraction, reporting that Bland had described the sender of the telegram as "fat and round-faced." The *Herald* added, "Ormiston is slender and thin-faced." Actually the handwriting on the telegraph blank was so scribbled that experts could not make out the signature. Was it Dr. Merton? or Dr. Murten? or, as someone suggested, Ormiston? But why would Ormiston, if implicated in Sister's disappearance, wire her mother, "Daughter O.K."? Wouldn't the drowning theory offer a welcome cover, if it had been an escapade? And why would Ormiston sign his name to such a wire, then show up in Los Angeles to tell police that he knew nothing about the disappearance? The only rhyme and reason for such bizarre conduct would be that Ormiston was in cahoots with the kidnappers, an opinion some of Mrs.

McPherson's attorneys entertained.

If skepticism concerning Sister bubbled in Los Angeles, the eruption did not reach Douglas, Arizona. The leading citizens of that town, headed by Mayor A.E. Hinton, dispatched to Mrs. McPherson a testimonial supporting her story. The document reads:

"We the undersigned residents of Douglas, Arizona, who have been greatly interested in the mass of charges and countercharges regarding the truth of Mrs. Aimee Semple McPherson's story with regard to her abduction and subsequent reappearance in Douglas, believe:

"That the statements of Mrs. McPherson with regard to her reappearance here, after an escape from her abductors and her consequent walk into Agua Prieta, Sonora, Mexico, as a consequence of her being forced to flee on foot, are true, so far as we have been able to ascertain.

"That there has been no iota of proof adduced here that would in any way tend to disprove any of the statements made by Mrs. McPherson regarding her reappearance, and that as citizens of Douglas, in which city she appeared, and interested in righteousness and truth, we again affirm our belief in the statements she has made."

Lately Thomas cynically suspects that the tourist boom Douglas was enjoying as a result of exposure to nationwide publicity may have prompted that testimonial. But Douglas couldn't lose — in that respect — no matter whether the reappearance was genuine or not. Throughout the long ordeal Douglas, almost to a man, stood staunchly by the evangelist, and she never forgot to be grateful for the support.

## CHAPTER 11

# The McKinley-Morris Caper

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The bad publicity about its pastor didn't hurt attendances at Angelus Temple. Mrs. McPherson ministered to record crowds at virtually every service, and these came often, for her speaking schedule usually included three meetings on Sundays, two on Wednesdays, and at least one every other day except Monday. The main auditorium seated 5,300, and sometimes more than 7,000 crowded in, plus overflows in other smaller auditoriums upwards of 1,800. Often people sat on the platform floor around the evangelist, as well as standing along the walls and sitting on the stairs in the aisles of the two balconies.

In the summer of 1926 public opinion leaned in favor of the evangelist in spite of the newspapers' harangues and the attacks of certain other clergymen. The distinguished flocked to the services. On the Sunday before the grand jury voted to return no indictments, Senator and Mrs. William H. King of Utah attended, as well as an old friend of the Temple, the widow of William Jennings Bryan who had preached from Mrs. McPherson's pulpit before his passing.

Meanwhile, Long Beach's blind attorney McKinley wormed his way back into the case. "Wormed" may be the wrong word, because it's remotely possible his intentions were honorable and his efforts sincere. To accept that conclusion you almost have to discount completely the testimony of his secretary, Bernice Morris, after the lawyer's tragic death. If her allegations were true — namely, that her employer from the beginning disbelieved Mrs. McPherson's account of kidnapping and assumed her disappearance was completely voluntary — then McKinley's efforts to secure remuneration for his services from the Temple were a veritable rip-off, nothing short of extortion or obtaining money under false pretences.

It's possible — perhaps probable — that McKinley talked out of both sides of his mouth, pretending to credit the evangelist's story when conversing with her and her mother and scouting that same story when talking to Miss Morris and others. However, one of McKinley's bosom buddies, Mr. C.C. Patterson of Pomona, insisted that the lawyer told him he believed every word that Mrs. McPherson had said in regard to her being kidnapped. McKinley assured Patterson that he was confident he was in contact with the veritable kidnappers. Patterson was accustomed to visiting McKinley in his Long Beach office. On the day the attorney protested his faith in the evangelist, McKinley had asked Patterson whether there was anything about the case in the newspaper, and when advised affirmatively the attorney requested his friend to read it to him. Patterson often read various items to McKinley.

The blind attorney evidently had no further contact with the Temple after receiving the questions Mrs. Kennedy submitted to be passed on to Wilson and Miller, the purported kidnappers, until the night before the grand jury hearing commenced. He came to the Administration Building, now serving as a parsonage, very late, but Sister and Mother refused to admit him, perhaps on the advice of counsel. "We

were afraid to see him because people would say he was a witness and we had seen witnesses," the evangelist said concerning this attempted contact. "We told him to come back after the grand jury."

McKinley next approached Judge Carlos Hardy, but Hardy was hazy, when questioned three months later about the visits, as to whether this was before or after the grand jury session. The judge's best recollection placed the contact "in early July."

If McKinley was pretending his faith in Mrs. McPherson and his sincerity in dealing with the professed kidnappers, he completely snowed Judge Hardy. Hardy would later swear in court, "I believed the story that he (McKinley) told me in its entirety." Hardy insisted, "I believed he was acting sincerely." The two men conducted a considerable discussion in which McKinley supported the evangelist's story.

The first time or two Hardy saw the lawyer in July, McKinley came to the judge's chambers. McKinley rehearsed his original encounters with Wilson and Miller, which Hardy already knew from late May when Mrs. Kennedy informed him. But now the attorney had another encounter to report. He told Hardy about a visit from Wilson subsequent to the evangelist's reappearance. "McKinley, well, our plans failed, didn't they?" Wilson commenced. "They have got your woman in a hell of a shape." McKinley told Hardy he replied, "Yes, it seems so. Can't you help her out of it?" Wilson replied, "Well, I think I could, probably." He recommended that McKinley see Miller and make arrangements.

Later that July, McKinley communicated with Hardy again, advising that Wilson had decided not to cooperate in helping the evangelist, but that Miller was willing to furnish information concerning the first house where Mrs. McPherson had been held captive. Wilson suggested McKinley meet with Miller in San Francisco the following week. Wilson warned, "You can't bring anybody with you,

because if you do, we'll kill 'em."

Hardy remonstrated against the contact. "Mack, that is all foolishness. You cannot go to San Francisco. You can't go up there alone, a blind man. There is no use going up there anyway, because you could not deal with the men up there. They will probably ask you for money and you can't give them any money, and the whole thing will be futile." Later Hardy agreed that McKinley keep an appointment Miller requested at the St. Francis Hotel.

Meanwhile, McKinley was in contact with Mrs. McPherson and Mrs. Kennedy. By this time the Temple leaders were having stenographers monitor such meetings. Mae Waldron took down the proceedings in shorthand. McKinley proposed an interview with Mrs. McPherson in private, but Mother nixed that idea decisively. Then the lawyer launched into a lengthy statement:

"There are people, even those pretty high up, who would not stop at anything in this matter, and fire has to be fought with fire.

"Some time ago, though I will not mention the date, and I have witnesses to the truth of this — I was approached by two men from the Los Angeles *Times*."

The blind attorney, of course, had no way of checking whether these men actually represented that newspaper or just were pretending the association. He continued:

"They came to my home and said they had had a tip from somebody that this story I had given out was simply a ruse of mine put forth as a trap for you. They were, of course, opening themselves up for the story they wanted to tell me.

"They suggested I give the *Times* a regular story and come out with the fact that there never was any questions given to me and that if I would come out

with that sort of a story they had everything they needed for a complete routing of your forces. Of course, they assured me if I would do that I would be broadcasted in such a way my future would be made.

"That is to give you an idea of how far they will deviate from the truth and the right if occasion commands it. That would be quite a slap in the face of this other (presumably the Carmel identifications which were just breaking)."

McKinley told the Temple leaders that he declined the offer, but the pair pressed him. They returned to his office the next night and continued their pitch. "On both occasions they were turned down flat," the lawyer professed, assuring that he gave "no consideration" to the offer. "Whether it be the *Times* or Ryan, there is no step to which they would not go," he warned Sister and Mother. He continued:

"In the practice of criminal law we find many times evidence is dug up out of whole cloth. Personally, I felt sure of their motive. They urged that the benefits that would come (to me) from such a story would be many.

"An idea, to some people, is sufficient, and they produced the idea.

"When I went before the grand jury I told the same story I told you. In giving testimony they asked me for an opinion. I refused to give it. They are to form their own.

"Personally I want you to know and feel I am steadfastly in your favor. Many, however, do not know that, but there are times when it is wise to speak and greater assistance can be given by me in the psychological moment than running to the newspapers."

Mrs. McPherson here interrupted, "Do you feel you know

the kidnappers or how they can be reached?" Mae Waldron notes, "Mr. McKinley hesitated before replying," whereupon Mrs. Kennedy commented, "I know Mrs. McPherson has every confidence in Judge Hardy and I think the thing to do is to see the Judge while he is in town and have a talk with him." Hardy was then preparing to leave Los Angeles for a vacation. Mother remarked, "You are both lawyers and could understand each other better. I believe the proper thing for you to do, Mr. McKinley, would be to have a talk with Judge Hardy."

After elaborating on that recommendation, Mrs. Kennedy terminated the interview and, according to the stenographic report, "called in Dr. Howard to talk with Mr. McKinley on matters not pertaining to this case. Mrs. Kennedy and Mrs. McPherson both left the room."

Since Dr. Howard was a Baptist pastor from Douglas, Arizona, it is probably that the "matters not pertaining to the case" pertained to the lawyer's soul. The minister likely witnessed to McKinley concerning conversion to Christ.

This interview occurred about 3 p.m. on July 27. The transcript clearly demonstrates that McKinley oozed sincerity and protested his faith in Sister's story when closeted with the Temple leaders and their stenographer. Was he faking? Or was he honest?

McKinley initiated further communication with Superior Court Judge Carlos Hardy. On one visit to the jurist's office the lawyer took with him former United States Senator Perkey and suggested that Perkey might accompany him to San Francisco for the proposed rendezvous with kidnapper Miller.

McKinley suggested to Hardy how he proposed to determine whether his contacts were the abductors or frauds. He explained, "If they were genuine they could furnish information as to where they stayed the first few days and that probably could be verified; they need not go further than that if they don't want to disclose it, and we might be able to establish the story up to that point." McKinley also confided,



"Miller says that he will furnish all the information that the state wants to establish the fact that he had Mrs. McPherson."

Meanwhile, McKinley collected monies for expenses from the Temple, plus a \$1,000.00 retainer for his services in trying to get the kidnappers to prove they had abducted the evangelist. Bernice Morris, the lawyer's "eyes" and secretary professed that McKinley never confided to her his collection of the fee. But Mother Kennedy had a receipt signed by the attorney.

On August 15, McKinley and Morris went to San Francisco, professedly to meet Miller at the St. Francis Hotel. Miller didn't show up. Or if he did, the Long Beach pair didn't admit it. Possibly the accompaniment of the secretary who could identify him kept Miller at bay.

Meanwhile, if Bernice Morris is to be believed, McKinley was laughing up his sleeves at the Temple leaders. Actually, there seems to be no firm evidence of McKinley's duplicity except the testimony of Bernice Morris which she did not make public until after her employer's death when he could not contradict her, if contradiction was in order. If the secretary told the truth that she and McKinley disbelieved the kidnapping story, then she and the lawyer were openly engaging in fraud, for they pretended to be trying to help the evangelist. It's possible to give McKinley the benefit of the doubt only by discounting Miss Morris' testimony. If she told the truth, then McKinley was a liar and she his accomplice in dealings with Mrs. McPherson and her mother. Bernice Morris later certainly misrepresented her dealings with the Temple subsequent to her employer's death.

Meanwhile, McKinley was keeping in touch with Sister and Mother, continuously assuring them, "I know I can get in touch with these people (the purported kidnappers) because I keep their confidence because I am blind." McKinley confided what he said Wilson and Miller had told him concerning the nature of the anaesthetic used on the evangelist

when they snatched her at the beach and reported, "It is something more simple than chloroform."

The blind lawyer, in one of his last visits to the Temple parsonage, accepted a set of questions prepared by the evangelist, inquiring about details of the first captivity house. McKinley agreed to get these to Wilson and Miller. Mrs. Kennedy also had pieced together what she supposed was a fairly accurate route of the move from that first house to the shack in Mexico. She based this route on reports received at the Temple from people who saw or thought they saw the abductor's auto along the route. Sister and Mother asked McKinley to have the kidnappers sketch such a map with which they could compare their ideas. Sister also asked if McKinley could get photographs of the kidnappers and perhaps arrange for Steve - presumably Miller - to telephone her. She didn't expect she could recognize Wilson's voice - if it was really Wilson - because he had spoken but little in her presence during captivity.

People reading Lately Thomas' "Vanishing Evangelist" very easily could get the wrong idea where that author portrays McKinley and Miss Morris' question alludes to "the toilet that was supposed to be in the first house," McKinley's alleged answer, "Yes, there would have to be a toilet in it, because she said in the grand jury there was a toilet that flushed in this shack" (p.192). But the first place was not the shack, but the house. Thus the misrepresentation - that the shack in Mexico had a flushing toilet, a claim the evangelist never once made - so humorously proclaimed in the poem on page 106 (*op. cit.*) - seems compounded. This misrepresentation of Mrs. McPherson's story has kept on being reported down through the years, so that a sizeable segment of the public really believes she made that statement, but a scrutiny of her transcribed story shows absolutely that she said from the beginning that there was no toilet in the shack in Mexico, just in the first house of captivity.

Now we must tackle the hardest hurdle in the way of

giving McKinley himself the benefit of the doubt regarding the question of his sincerity and honesty in dealing with the Temple leaders. For apparently the attorney did participate in a ruse about a picture. He did take this picture to Angelus Temple a few days before his death. Miss Morris claimed he returned to his office and reported that Mrs. McPherson positively identified the man as "Steve."

But the man was not Steve, but Joe Watts. And both Mrs. Kennedy and Mrs. McPherson denied that the evangelist had made any identification.

McKinley apparently connived in a sordid trick master-minded by Miss Morris who served as photographer. The only possible plea which could be made in defense of his seemingly tarnished sincerity would be that he participated in the scheme to test Mrs. McPherson's sincerity - to determine whether she was so gung ho to identify a kidnapper that she would identify any stranger whose picture he showed. Miss Morris could have lied when she alleged her employer reported that Sister identified Joe Watts' photo as a kidnapper. Or McKinley could have lied to that effect when he reported the incident to his secretary. Evidently the claim that the evangelist identified the picture rests on the unsupported word of Bernice Morris and would seem to be at best "heresay evidence." At any rate, Bernice Morris took the picture of sometimes process server Joe Watts, and McKinley showed it to Sister.

Bernice Morris "confessed" also concerning an alleged telephone identification of a kidnapper. The evangelist had given McKinley phone numbers where she could be reached around the clock. Lately Thomas, replying on the secretary, relates that McKinley proposed, "We'll have Joe Watts talk to her over the phone." Miss Morris afterwards asked, "Well, Joe, did you talk to Aimee?" Watts answered, "Sure did." The secretary inquired, "What did she say?" "Oh, she recognized me all right," Joe replied. "She said, 'My God, is it really you?'" cf. "Vanishing Evangelist," pp. 192-193).

Lately Thomas does not report what the Los Angeles *Times* of September 17, 1926 revealed on page 2 of Section I, that in a face to face confrontation with Bernice Morris in the private office of District Attorney Asa Keyes, Joe Watts denied absolutely making the telephone call to Mrs. McPherson and impersonating the voice of her kidnapper. He did admit posing for the photo which McKinley delivered to the Temple. But Watts averred that he did not know for what use the photo was taken.

Whether Watts made the phone call or not - and it seems significant that he was not called to testify about the matter at the preliminary hearing, so the District Attorney likely accepted Watts' denial - somebody did phone Mrs. McPherson and pretend to be a kidnapper. But witnesses in the room during the phone call insisted the evangelist did not respond, "My God, is it really you?" Mrs. Herbert Price quoted Sister as saying, "It sounds something like it, but I cannot be sure." Mrs. Price was the daughter of Elizabeth Frame, in whose house at Santa Monica beach the phone call came. Those who knew Mrs. McPherson immediately realized that the alleged response, "My God, is it really you?" would be completely out of character for the evangelist who would regard such an exclamation as profanity.

R.A. McKinley didn't know it, but he was nearing the end of his connection with the case. The very same night of August 25 - on the morning of which Bernice Morris claimed Joe Watts made the trick call Watts denied - the blind lawyer attended a lodge meeting. He left the meeting in a car with James Law and L.O. Miller. The driver missed a sharp turn at a detour marker and plunged into the mire near the viaduct being built at Wilmington Boulevard. All three men were killed when the car overturned. Some wonder whether foul play might have been involved, whether the marker had been temporarily removed by persons involved in the kidnapping in order to booby-trap the blind lawyer. But no evidence substantiated such suspicions.

When investigators arrived at the accident scene they found on McKinley's body the set of questions Sister had submitted to be passed on to the kidnappers. This circumstance gave the public the first inkling of that the lawyer was still involved. The *Los Angeles Times* reported, "Although Mr. McKinley had figured prominently during the early part of the evangelist's disappearance when he announced that two men had come to him because of his blindness and told him that they had kidnapped Mrs. McPherson, it was not known until after his death that the attorney was still working on the case" (part II, page 1, August 27, 1926).

Mrs. McPherson and her mother regarded McKinley's death as a severe blow. They drove to Woods Undertaking Parlor to pay their respects, then proceeded to McKinley's office to enlist Bernice Morris to try to continue the efforts to contact Wilson and Miller.

From this point on ensues an irreconcilable conflict in the testimony. Eventually Bernice Morris made a "confession" alleging that Mrs. McPherson and her mother endeavored to enlist her efforts to manufacture false evidence. The Temple leaders denied emphatically they had done anything of the kind. They insisted that they acted in good faith, expecting that the secretary might possibly be able to continue carrying on negotiations with Wilson and Miller.

Miss Morris had felt no qualms about manufacturing fake evidence in the matter of the Joe Watts picture. With a relish she had pulled that deceit off. She seemed almost proud of her feat when she confessed how she disguised Watts' face with paint and powder before she snapped the shutter of her Brownie camera. But now she professed her conscience was bothering her. She had to make a full and complete breast of the matter.

The story Mrs. McPherson and Minnie Kennedy told about their contacts with the late lawyer's secretary differed materially from Miss Morris'. It seems noteworthy that the

secretary strung Sister and Mother along until after the "hoax woman," Lorraine Wiseman-Sielaff, issued her first "confession" after being jailed for a bad check charge when the Temple refused to put up the money for her bail.

The women drove attorney Wooley's vehicle when they called at McKinley's office the morning after his death. Miss Morris seemed eager to carry on her late employer's contacts with Miller and Wilson. But she did object to one paragraph in a statement Mrs. Kennedy prepared for release that day. She asked Mother to omit the section which read:

"At this time Mr. McKinley gave us certain other points of information regarding the persons (kidnappers), and including the location of the first house in which Mrs. McPherson was held. (He had said it was in India.) He outlined the route followed and, more important still, the peculiar form of anesthetic used which we had never thought of."

The typewritten document of the entire statement, filling almost three sheets of legal size paper, double-spaced, has this paragraph encircled in pencil, with the word "out" before the first sentence, and "omit" after the last sentence. Mrs. Kennedy must have been most desirous to obtain Miss Morris' cooperation, for she wasn't the type to yield to such a request otherwise.

Lately Thomas misconstrued the statement Mrs. Kennedy made, attributing to her an announcement that "Sister had spoken to them (the kidnappers) on the telephone" (p. 332, op.cit.). Mother said nothing of the kind. Her exact words in the press statement were, "While we were visiting at the Beach we received a call from Mr. McKinley and after speaking with Mrs. McPherson a moment the other voice came on the wire and said a few words. I'm not at liberty to say more regarding this matter now." If Lately Thomas' source reported a telephone identification, that source

misrepresented what Minnie Kennedy said.

Bernice Morris made several trips to the Temple in the next two weeks. On August 29, in the presence of Attorney Wooley, she signed a document which read:

"Miss Bernice Morris, secretary of the late Russell A. McKinley, attorney at Long Beach, California, when pressed for a statement for the press concerning Mr. McKinley's contact with the kidnappers of Mrs. Aimee Semple McPherson, made the following statement:

"Yes, it is true that as secretary to Mr. Russell A. McKinley, attorney at Long Beach, California, that as announced by Mr. McKinley I know he was in direct contact with two men who stated that they were the persons who kidnapped Aimee Semple McPherson. I recently accompanied Mr. McKinley on a trip to San Francisco, California, in connection with this matter. I can say nothing further at this time as the information received by me is a professional secret. His death coming in as it did is a great tragedy. I am sorry I cannot tell what I know. Mr. McKinley was working hard to solve the kidnapping and bring harm to no one; and it is my hope to be instrumental in finishing the work he started. I trust the newspapers will give their support. I want to be fair to every one, but ask for people to be patient for the time being. Mr. McKinley's policy was one of silent and unquestionable loyalty to his clients, and I want to emulate him as far as possible. I can state nothing further at this time."

On the witness stand at the preliminary hearing Bernice Morris admitted that she signed this statement, though she professed she had done so reluctantly. The District Attorney's office tried to whitewash her and palm her off as an inexperienced novice who did not know what she was doing, a role the woman indeed tried to affect. However, Bernice

Morris had been serving as both "eyes" and secretary to a lawyer whose clientele mostly was the underworld, especially bootlegging interests. Moreover, she was studying law with a goal to be admitted to the California State Bar. Indeed, from her own mouth she contradicted the image of inexperience, for she testified in court that she responded to Mrs. McPherson's caution, "I want to be sure before this thing is presented to the public (the evidence Miller was to submit) that every detail is checked," with a virtual guarantee. "I told her she could be absolutely sure that if I had anything to do with it, it would be airtight before I got through with it, because I was studying to pass the bar examination. I didn't want to ruin my chances." Does that sound like an inexperienced child? Bernice Morris was no novice, as subsequent disclosures exposed. Indeed, her eventual "confession" unmasked her as a fraud, for it was the same Bernice who faked the kidnapper's picture who professed in the statement she signed on August 29, "I am sorry I cannot tell what I know. Mr. McKinley was working hard to solve the kidnapping and bring harm to no one; and it is my hope to be instrumental in finishing the work he started . . . I want to be fair to every one, but ask for people to be patient for the time being. Mr. McKinley's policy was to one of silent and unquestionable loyalty to his clients, and I want to emulate him as far as possible!"

So Bernice Morris seems striped as a perjurer-either when she signed that statement or when she blurted her "confession."

But that confession would not come until September 15, five days after a very tense meeting at the Angelus Temple parsonage. Mrs. McPherson, Mrs. Kennedy, and Mae Waldron saw the secretary who said she came to enlist the evangelist to write a letter to cheer up a young man in deep trouble, Mr. Coy Halbert. Sister dictated to stenographer Waldron a brief note expressing sympathy for him in his sorrow and telling him to look to the Lord, who is a very

present help in time of trouble. Mrs. McPherson volunteered to pray for the man that he might be freed from the criminal charge, "if, as Miss Morris has said, it was a false accusation."

Miss Morris also alluded to the kidnappers, advising that they had been out of town, but now had returned and would prepare the map the evangelist had requested, outlining the route between the first captivity house and Mexico. Miss Morris volunteered that she felt the men should have \$1,500 for their services.

Mother Kennedy exploded, "Absolutely not. I gave Mr. McKinley \$1,000 and have received nothing of tangible value in return. If these are the men they should be glad to prove it and it will be to their advantage to get the reward offered. They must provide the map and locate the house, and then we will send investigators, including public officials, down to the neighborhood and from those who live in the vicinity seek to verify or to disprove their story."

Bernice Morris reacted in surprise, exclaiming that she thought Sister and Mother were already convinced that Miller and Wilson were the right men. When pressed, "Why should you think we're convinced when no absolute evidence has been forthcoming," Miss Morris blurted, "Why, the photograph. Didn't Mrs. McPherson identify it?" Both the evangelist and Mrs. Kennedy denied any identification. "Nobody could identify it," Mother fumed. "You could merely see the outline of a man's figure, but no features clearly whatever, and his hands were hidden behind him. The Kodak picture was absolutely worthless."

All the ensuing protestations by Mrs. McPherson that she did not identify the picture could not silence the effect of Bernice Morris' hearsay testimony that she did — if actually McKinley communicated that information to his secretary at all. Sister, Mother, and Mae Waldron knew no identification was made. Miss Morris then professed to communicate information allegedly from the kidnappers concerning an

incident during the captivity. She asked Mrs. McPherson whether she remembered the day she complained about a crick in her neck and how Rose had rubbed it all afternoon. Such ministrations sound out of character for Rose. Sister answered, "No, I do not recall that."

Bernice Morris kept lowering her financial demands to cover the kidnapper's expenses in providing the desiderated information. At last the figure of \$100 was agreed upon. "Mrs. McPherson then handed to Miss Morris, in my presence," Mae Waldron swore, "one hundred dollars in cash, saying that was to take care of their expenses until such time as the map was produced and checked on. Miss Morris accepted the money and thanked her and said that they would have the map shortly." But Bernice Morris refused to sign the receipt Mrs. Kennedy requested, acknowledging the transaction.

This was on September 10, 1926. On September 15th Bernice Morris' "confession" that Mrs. McPherson had "coached" her to produce manufactured evidence made headlines in the *Los Angeles Times*, scooping the other metropolitan dailies. What consideration the newspaper offered for the tale remains unknown.

Miss Morris made much of Mrs. McPherson's solicitation of specific details of the first captivity house, alleging that the evangelist was making prerequisites for the identification. Mrs. Kennedy, when she learned of the "confession," snorted, "The statements that Mrs. McPherson 'coached' Miss Morris concerning the furnishings of the house is untrue. The fact of this is that Mrs. McPherson's former public statement covered this matter in such detail that almost anyone could 'set up' such a house and we would not accept that alone as evidence. We did feel, however, that if the house was produced, that the people of the vicinity near it would know something about the strange parties who had recently occupied it."

Bernice Morris' abandonment distressed the Temple leaders. They had good reason to be skeptical of the entire

McKinley-Morris negotiations. They reviewed the late lawyer's profession of loyalty. Mae Waldron's stenographic record of McKinley's visit to the parsonage on July 27 reported the attorney's assurance, "Personally I want you to know and feel I am steadfastly in your favor." Judge Hardy had communicated to Sister and Mother that McKinley had expressed to him his complete belief in Sister's story of the kidnapping. And the judge had shared with the women a letter from McKinley, dated July 29, in which the lawyer, after listing personal expenses he had incurred in the investigation, repudiated any "intention to endeavor to capitalize" on "the part I have accidentally played in this matter," adding, "I am willing to cooperate with you and them (Sister and Mother) in any way, looking toward a satisfactory ending of this monumental attempt to besmirch the character of as fine a woman as it has ever been my good fortune to meet." Was that the real McKinley?

The Temple leaders were in a quandry, whether to believe McKinley was sincere, or a fraud. They wanted to believe in him, because he afforded the only known link to men who claimed to be kidnappers. Judge Hardy's confidence in the blind Long Beach lawyer had put them at ease. But now Bernice Morris was blating that McKinley never believed the evangelist was kidnapped. Mrs. Kennedy offered a terse observation concerning the attorney, "If he was wrong, he fooled Judge Hardy, because it was only after Judge Hardy had declared his belief that the man had been approached by the actual kidnappers that we retained him."

Soon after Miss Morris' confession startled the Southland, derogatory material concerning her commenced to surface. A Miss McTaggart of Long Beach notified the Temple that Evangelist Merton in the Methodist Church South stated that Miss Morris buried some papers with Mr. McKinley, slipping them into the casket just before it was lowered. Then it came to light that Bernice was not just Miss Morris, but Mrs. Bernice Morris Allcorn Simpson!

On September 26, Mr. Francis M. Darter of the Southern Pacific Engineering Department, a resident of Long Beach, made a statement in which he hinted the secretary had homosexual connections, in addition to being "loose in character." Darter attributed the accusation to a prominent Long Beach attorney.

Living with Bernice Morris at this time was a girl who passed herself off as the secretary's sister. Darter declared, "Miss Morris' supposed sister is not her sister, but is a Miss Billie Hensen, sometimes called Eloise Hensen." He alleged the girl suffered from syphilis and had served time in some Los Angeles reform school. Billie was then about eighteen and quite attractive.

Another report came by an anonymous phone call to Attorney Wooley's office. The caller, according to the lawyer, reported that "Miss Morris had been trapped by a detective in an embarrassing position and that this was being held over her head and that she was being forced to make a public refutation of" Mrs. McPherson. Otherwise she would be publicly embarrassed herself.

When Wooley reported the information to the Temple, Sister and Mother declared jointly, "Our dealings with Mr. McKinley and with Miss Morris have been absolutely regular at all times. There is no doubt in our mind that coercive methods have been used upon Miss Morris; because she knows in her own heart that these charges against us are untrue."



## CHAPTER 12

# Carmel

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About the time blind attorney Russell McKinley was getting back into the case, a mystery woman barged into the office of Monterey, California's police chief and volunteered to divulge how he could ascertain the whereabouts of Aimee Semple McPherson during the eleven days between May 19 and 29. Chief Gabrielson, rather incompetently some thought, agreed to her ultimatum that he not try to discover her identity. He easily could have elicited the information she was eager to communicate and then have proceeded to learn who she was. Perhaps he was overwhelmed with excitement over the possibility of prominence the revelation could mean for his career. At any rate, he listened to the tipster who suggested he buy a lout in Carmel a few drinks to loosen his tongue. Gabrielson proceeded to make the contact and was told that Mrs. McPherson had spent the time, posing as a Mrs. George McIntire, in a cottage on Scenic Drive in Carmel-by-the-Sea.

Gabrielson paid a visit to the address and found the owner, Mr. H.C. Benedict, living in the premises. But Benedict

confided that he had moved out by May 18 in order to rent the cottage to the McIntire couple who contracted for a three month stay. Mr. McIntire paid the first month's rent when he engaged the property on May 14 and tendered the last two months rent on the day he moved in. Benedict reported that the pair moved out suddenly on the 29th, advising him by letter that the illness of Mrs. McIntire's mother called them east. He produced several articles the couple had left in the cottage when they departed.

Gabrielson notified Los Angeles authorities and Joe Ryan entrained north to investigate. Whether it was sour grapes on Gabrielson's part because he was shunted out of the limelight, or whether he sincerely objected to Ryan's pressure methods to force witnesses to identify Mrs. McPherson as the woman in the cottage, the fact remains that Gabrielson complained that "Mr. Ryan's conduct of this case was most unethical" (*Los Angeles Times*, July 31, 1926, Part II, p.1). Later, Cline came to Carmel to work with his son-in-law. And newspapermen swarmed to the Scenic Drive premises. Ryan put the reporters to work ransacking the grounds for evidence and tracking down potential witnesses. The press seemed willing to vilify the evangelist. She never felt the intentions were malicious, but rather economic. The scandal would sell papers. But her friends complained bitterly, especially when the press buried Captain Cline's drunk driving arrest on inside pages, devoting but a few lines to the accident. Why did newsmen help Mrs. McPherson's detractors against her while giving those same detractors protection in print they refused to the evangelist? Lately Thomas concedes that Herman Cline was "helped by a sympathetic press" (p. 196, *op. cit.*).

Ryan had no difficulty rounding up more than a dozen witnesses willing to swear that George McIntire was in reality Kenneth G. Ormiston. Indeed, this identification apparently was never disputed by anyone and was later confirmed by Ormiston. But the witnesses were not so sure about the

Identity of the woman. Ryan got nowhere when he tackled Benedict and tried to secure a statement that Mr. McIntire was really Mrs. McPherson. Benedict acknowledged meeting his tenants in the yard of his cottage on May 20. He had come over to plant some bulbs. Mr. McIntire saw him and brought his "wife" out and introduced her to the landlord. It seems incredible to suppose that if Ormiston had been shackled up with a well-known celebrity he would have needlessly exposed her to Carmel citizens who might easily identify her from the pictures in the papers.

Ryan badgered Benedict for a half-hour, but the landlord refused to identify his tenant as Aimee Semple McPherson. The Deputy District Attorney flashed a sheaf of photographs of the evangelist, conveniently provided by a Los Angeles newspaper. One of the pictures was the pose Captain Herman Cline had requested he be included in by the car at Ocean Park when Sister accompanied him there to describe the snatch.

Ryan got nowhere with Benedict, but his methods produced better cooperation from several other Carmel residents. While there seem to be no stenographic records of interviews the Deputy District Attorney conducted with Benedict and other prospective identifiers, the investigative pattern so often has unfolded in the following manner that we can almost be sure Ryan proceeded something like this: "Mr. Benedict" or Mr. and Mrs. Parkes or Mr. Swanson, or Mr. Renkert, *et al* — "we have every reason to believe that these are pictures of the woman you saw at the cottage on Scenic Drive. Now don't make up your mind too quickly. Look these photos over. Study them very carefully. Take your time."

If the witnesses tended to nod a negative, the interrogator likely urged, "No, no, don't shake your head. At least, not yet. Remember that pictures often look a bit different from the actual appearance of an individual. Sometimes you have to look several times to be sure. So just take your time and keep on studying these pictures."

More often than not a doubtful witness caves in under pressure of that kind and agrees to an identification. This has happened so very many times that the fact is a truism. But Benedict refused to be intimidated by Ryan. However, others marshalled less resistance. From photographs only half a dozen witnesses interviewed by Joe Ryan identified the evangelist as "Mrs. McIntire." Not one of these witnesses had ever seen Sister before, though most, if not all, admitted they had noticed photographs of her in the newspapers during the period of her disappearance and at that time made no connection in their minds with the Carmel cottage. Obviously, pictures alone were not enough to force identifications. What photos could not do by themselves, Ryan's pressure tactics produced.

Having secured the "identifications," Ryan reported ecstatically to Asa Keyes by telephone, "There is no doubt in my mind but that Mrs. McPherson and Ormiston were here from the morning of May 19 to the night of May 28." The deputy cited, in addition to the identifications, "handwriting evidence" as proving the rendezvous beyond a shadow of a doubt.

The handwriting evidence was two grocery slips found out in the yard of the Carmel cottage by none other than Mrs. Ryan, who had made the trip with her husband. Even before handwriting experts examined the documents the authorities pontificated that they were in the evangelist's handwriting. One scrap of paper listed apples, rhubarb, prunes, rice, tapioca, and the other had butter, meat, bran, pears, strawberries, grapefruit, and lemons.

When Mrs. McPherson learned about the "discovery" of the grocery slips she dismissed it as a "plant." Her mother and others confirmed that most of the items on the list were foods the evangelist never used. Except for apples and staples like butter and meat, the articles were foreign to the evangelist's diet. Furthermore, an astute observer would have smelled a rat at once in the listing of just plain "meat," instead of the name of the cut or kind ordered. It must be remembered

that these "grocery slips" were supposed to have been left at the back door for a delivery boy to pick up. Whoever heard of writing "meat" on such an order? The butcher wouldn't have the slightest idea what kind of meat to send. Sister claimed the slips were forgeries.

The circumstances of the discovery also tend to discredit the lists. The Benedicts had moved back into their cottage some weeks earlier. A landlord who would take pains to plant bulbs in the yard while tenants occupied the premises would likely remove litter from his yard. These grocery slips, however, were supposed to have survived two full months in that yard — and that in a coastal town where dews and fogs were frequent!

But were the slips in the evangelist's handwriting? The authorities produced handwriting expert Milton Carson who alleged they were. But Carlson had apparently erred on the "Dr. Merton" telegram. He identified the handwriting on the blank filed with the clerk as belonging to Kenneth G. Ormiston, but the clerk who took the telegram under circumstances so suspicious that he would remember the incident described the writer's appearance as such that he could not have been the radio man. Handwriting examination is not an exact science even yet, and it was far from such in 1926. Another handwriting expert, testifying at the preliminary hearing concerning these grocery slips, demonstrated that they had been doctored apparently even before Carlson saw them! Who doctored them? They remained in the possession of the Los Angeles authorities, so no one connected with the Temple could have tampered with them! They had to have been doctored either before their discovery in the back yard of the cottage or while in the possession of the police or District Attorney's office. Which time seems likeliest I will leave for the reader to ponder.

Naturally, the press all over the country ate up the alleged scandal. Ryan and Cline crowed that the case was solved. Mrs. McPherson felt defenseless against the

relentless assault. All she could do was issue denials which couldn't command the clout that the sensational charges exercised. She maintained her poise, but her attorney, Roland Wooley, exploded with indignation. The Los Angeles *Times* of July 27, 1926 quoted his statement on page 2 of part II:

"It is not remarkable that different people are reported to have come forward with further 'identifications' of Mrs. McPherson. It is significant that these so-called identifications arrive at this late date and indicate that the possessors of this information evidently have waited to be prompted by self-styled investigators.

"If Kenneth G. Ormiston was at Carmel-by-the-Sea attended by a woman, there is absolutely no evidence to indicate Mrs. McPherson's presence there. He may have been there. It makes no difference to us. I know she was not there.

"All identifications so-called of Mrs. McPherson, however, are based on conjecture because she was not at Carmel-by-the-Sea at any time. Furthermore, there seems to be an increasing tendency for so-called identifications of Mrs. McPherson and others to spring up wherever these self-styled investigators center their activities. It is most surprising what some people will resort to for publicity.

"We cite the incident at Salinas. It has completely blown down before the blast of truth. The garage man to whom the so-called identification was credited has made a complete and unequivocal denial. The other identifications have been blasted likewise."

The Salinas identification Wooley referred to involved Dennis Collins. Ryan had told the grand jury that Collins identified Mrs. McPherson as accompanying Ormiston to the garage. But the garageman told a different story. He was one of the witnesses Judge J.A. Bardin of Salinas interviewed

when Wooley solicited his services. Bardin, by this time, retained the title of judge only by courtesy, having returned to private practice in Salinas in partnership with Russell Scott. Collins assured Bardin that he'd never made the identification Ryan reported. And on the back of both a front view and profile photo of Mrs. McPherson, the garageman wrote, "The photograph of this woman does not resemble the woman I saw with Ormiston the latter part of May 1926 at the Highway Garage in Salinas, California." Wooley sent the photos with disclaimer to District Attorney Keyes.

Attorney Wooley's statement on July 26 concluded with the affirmation, "Mrs. McPherson's story stands as it will always — unshaken."

Meanwhile, Cline and Ryan had a problem. None of their identification witnesses had ever seen Mrs. McPherson in person. Identifications of this kind, as Erle Stanley Gardner would reiterate later, constitute the "most dangerous evidence in the world," indeed, "about the weakest evidence we have, especially when the party identifying and being identified are previously unknown to each." Gardner put into the mouth of Perry Mason the statement, "You know and I know that personal identification evidence is just about the worst, the most unreliable type of evidence we have, not when a person identifies someone he knows, but when he gets a glimpse of an individual and then later on makes an 'identification' either from a photograph or from personal contact" (p. 113, "The Case of the Beautiful Beggar," Morrow, New York).

Even identifications of people you know, however, can prove errant. I well recall an incident aboard the Queen Elizabeth in 1961. Across a public room I spied a man I'd met several times, a physician from the Philippines who served as an after-dinner speaker at two functions I'd attended within the past year. I was surprised to find him on the ship and delighted as well. I barged up to him with my hand outstretched and exclaimed, "Dr. Quemada!" But it wasn't Dr.

Quemada, or his twin brother, which he didn't have, of course, though the resemblance was so striking the "identification" was understandable.

It isn't just a serious defect in police procedure which triggers mistaken identifications. The processes of the human memory prove fallible, sometimes on a large scale. Mrs. McPherson's personal scrapbook of press clippings contains an item from the front page of the Canon City, Colorado, *Daily Record*, dated October 2, 1926. The caption announces, "DESPITE FACT ALVORSON BODY WAS IDENTIFIED BY 200 PEOPLE TURNS OUT TO BE ANOTHER MAN." The sub-headlines read, "Florence People Had Bought Flowers for Funeral; Alvorson's Wife and Children Believed Body That of Father at First; Insane Asylum Guard Identifies Man as Escaped Inmate." So eyewitnesses' personal identifications are not necessarily infallible evidence.

Cline and Ryan realized that the longer the confrontation between their witnesses at Carmel and the evangelist they thought they saw there, was delayed, the more vulnerable the testimony would be to refutation. After all, it was two months since the fleeting glimpses had been caught. Cline got on the phone to the Temple and virtually demanded that Mrs. McPherson come at once to Carmel to face her accusers. He also wanted her to submit to fingerprinting in order to compare her prints with those on an allspice can left by the McIntires in the cottage and the prints authorities hoped to get from books also left by the mystery woman.

Mrs. McPherson probably would have acquiesced to Cline's demands, but her lawyers put their foot down. In no way would they permit their client to be harassed in this manner. Wooley knew police procedure. He could document countless cases where preliminary identifications from photos had been followed by identifications in person, prompted because of the resemblance of the person to photographs the witness had studied at great length. Wooley and Veitch both nixed the trip. Arthur Veitch, in refusing to

permit his client to be fingerprinted, volunteered that the evangelist's prints were available in many places: "I have no doubt that they could be picked up and photographed in 10,000 places if the officials care to do it." Wooley added, "Not for one moment will we subject Mrs. McPherson to the indignity of having her handwriting and fingerprints taken just for the purposes of exposing another one of the wild and obviously concocted identifications." (Los Angeles Times, p.2, part II, July 28, 1926).

Yet the evangelist's following of the legal advice has been used against her, with the rationalization, "If she wasn't at Carmel, why wouldn't she go there and face the witnesses?" Sister gave a Biblical precedent for staying by her work at the Temple, paraphrasing Nehemiah 6:3 as the basis for a sermon, "I Am Doing a Great Work, So That I Cannot Come Down to Carmel." She would have lost at least two days of meetings had she complied with Cline's call.

Ryan's investigations at Carmel resurrected rumors of an abortion. Someone in the town reportedly said that Mrs. McIntire looked pregnant. The names of Carmel physicians R.A. Kocher and William Davidson were insinuated into the rumors. Reportedly they had been seen at the cottage under circumstances which aroused suspicions of an illegal operation. They denied the allegations vehemently. But the rumors persisted. A Los Angeles newspaper dared the evangelist to submit to a medical examination to settle the matter. She agreed, provided the paper pay the doctor and nurse who must come to the Temple after an evening service to perform the examination. Sister had called the newspaper's bluff. It called off the examination.

Meanwhile, Judge Bardin had exploded other rumors in the Carmel area alleging that Mrs. McIntire had undergone surgery in a sanitarium or hospital in the area.

A fingerprint expert went to work on the allspice can the McIntires had left behind when he quit the cottage. Police Sergeant Barlow reported on July 30 that the prints "were

undoubtedly a woman's but were so indistinct that they could not be possibly used to make an identification" (Los Angeles Times, July 31, 1926, part II, page 2). Barlow lied. Lately Thomas' assessment of the fabrication that the police "were not wholly candid" (p.177, *op. cit.*), represents a masterpiece of understatement. Barlow identified fingerprints all right, but they belonged to newspapermen who, as "The Vanishing Evangelist" puts it, "infested the Benedict grounds. This embarrassment was kept from the public." Here is just another example of how circumstances favorable to the evangelist were muzzled by the press and police!

The Times had also reported on July 26 that fingerprints on the books at the Carmel cottage were to be checked page by page, but on August 2 the same Los Angeles newspaper reported that Sergeant Barlow failed to obtain any fingerprints from these abandoned books. Moreover, Mr. Benedict certified that the Biblical annotations and memoranda which the authorities confiscated from the cottage were in the handwriting of his wife, and that the Bible, concerning which much was made, for some time belonged to Mrs. Benedict. Attorney Wooley forwarded this information also to Asa Keyes. Not even "Mrs. McIntire" had any connection with these items which authorities had attempted to link with Mrs. McPherson.

Meanwhile, Attorney Wooley was issuing statements to the press wholesale. After a personal trip to Carmel he announced, "After two days of careful and impartial investigation . . . it may be truthfully said that the mystery surrounding the identity of the couple (at Carmel) actually present is still unsolved." He scouted the professed "identification witness":

"It is difficult for a fair and prudent mind to reconcile the widely varying descriptions of the woman. . . Note the following discrepancies: One person says, 'The woman was 40 or more'; another is

positive that she was 'a girl of not over 25 years'; another states she had dark eyes, dark hair, and olive complexion, and still another emphatically states that a blond woman opened the door for him when he called at the house.

"It must be remembered that the so-called identity witnesses saw this woman two months before they were called upon to identify her by the 'picture' method; and that so far as can now be determined, under the most ordinary circumstances, when nothing of an unusual nature took place to arouse attention or to fix in the minds of the observers mental picture of the features of personality of the woman."

Wooley remonstrated regarding the cultivation of abortion rumors:

"The foundation for the insinuations that a criminal operation was performed seems to rest solely upon the following facts fed by the very fertile imaginations of certain detectives at work — more with an eye to their own ambitions than to a correct solution of the so-called Carmel mystery. At the time the Los Angeles officials were present at Carmel, a visit was made to the Benedict home. The mere fact that no one was there offered but little obstacle to the 'scientific' detectives in the squad; a forcible entry was made; a medicine bottle was found; it bore the date of May 25, one of the very days of so much importance; it bore the name of a Carmel physician and also of a local druggist. Demand for the prescription file of the druggist was made in a matter not warranted. No officer of Monterey County was present. Upon their departure it was ascertained that the prescription referred to had been prescribed by Dr. Lowell for Mr. Benedict and contained some commonplace preparation. Mr. Benedict was not living at his bungalow on Scenic Drive on May 25, but

shortly after that he returned to his own home, taking with him the simple medical compound prescribed for him by his family physician. Simple as these facts, nevertheless, upon them has been reared a malicious theory, which has now completely crumbled" (Los Angeles Times, July 31, 1926, part II, pp. 1-2).

Is it any wonder that Monterey Police Chief Gabrielson complained that "Mr. Ryan's conduct of this case was most unethical"?

Wooley denounced the "Carmel evidence" against Sister as "founded on thin air" and insisted, "the story of Mrs. McPherson's abduction as told by her remains unshaken." After returning to Los Angeles from the seaside resort town, he advised Asa Keyes by letter, 'Whatever may be the view of your office, as to the truth of the accusation that Mrs. McPherson was at Carmel during a part of May of this year, a most casual canvass of the Carmel opinion on the subject will positively disclose that it is the belief of the citizens of Carmel that she was not there. It is the belief of the sober minded people of that community that a great injustice had been done Mrs. McPherson.'

As July drew to an end, Asa Keyes grew inclined to agree with Wooley. On the 31st he revoked the subpoenas of Carmel witnesses against the evangelist his office had issued commanding appearances before the Los Angeles grand jury. He conceded, "The evidence from Carmel is far from conclusive," when reporters caught up with him the next day, that the testimony was "in no way as binding as had been indicated in unofficial reports." He meant newspaper dispatches which unequivocally proclaimed the evangelist had been absolutely identified as Mrs. McIntire. Keyes countered that the evidence "failed to stand up under closer scrutiny," and confided, "Our evidence from the north collapsed" (all quotes from Los Angeles Times, August 2, 1926, part I, page 1). The Times' banner headlines



screeched, "KEYES DROPS M'PHERSON QUIZ."

A document which arrived on Monday, August 2, at Keyes' office apparently helped confirm Keyes' determination to drop the whole case. The mail service in 1926 apparently was faster than today's, for an affidavit executed in Chicago on July 31 by Kenneth G. Ormiston, before attorney Edward H.S. Martin, reached the District Attorney on the 2nd, fulfilling a promise which arrived by telegraph at Keyes' office on July 31. The day before that Mrs. McPherson had received a Western Union Telegram, filed at 9:55 a.m. Chicago time, with the following message: "SWORN STATEMENT TRUTH CONCERNING CARMEL INCIDENT CLEARING YOU ENROUTE. DEEPLY REGRET RYANS HORRIBLE ERROR." The sender was K.G. Ormiston. That same Friday, Asa Keyes received a mysterious telegram "BELLE OWENS" who apparently never was traced. Her wire advised, "THE WOMAN WITH MCINTIRE AT CARMEL WAS NOT AIMEE SEMPLE MCPHERSON BUT MY SISTER WHO IS HURRYING HOME FROM THE EAST TO EXPLAIN."

Asa Keyes studied Ormiston's affidavit carefully. He admitted he had occupied the Carmel cottage, but denied his companion was Mrs. McPherson. He called the woman "Miss X." Not until January would the radio man offer a name for his paramour, "Elizabeth Tovey, a nurse from Seattle." Ormiston outlined his movements during the Carmel cottage period and related the incident when Wallace Moore of the *Santa Barbara Morning Press* stopped him on May 29. Ormiston quoted what he claimed were the reporter's exact words, "I know Mrs. McPherson personally, having covered her meetings when in another paper, and I can see that your companion is not she."

Keyes evidently credited Ormiston's affidavit and intended to quit the case. Ryan exploded indignantly and a rift developed between chief and deputy. Ryan just may himself have leaked rumors which circulated to the effect that high

civic officials had pressured the District Attorney. It was a known fact that Mayor Cryer and President of the City Council Boyle Workman, as well as others in the city administration, were very friendly toward the evangelist. And on Sunday night, August 1, the wife of Superior Court Judge Carlos Hardy had announced from the Temple pulpit that her husband was devoting all his energies when off the bench to vindicating Sister, a statement which the judge modified considerably when notified concerning it. However, at the time his wife spoke, he was absent from the Temple doing some work on the case!

Of course, there was no pressure from "upstairs," as the subsequent resumption of the case proves. Mrs. McPherson's friends were so confident of her innocence that they felt she could only be vindicated the more if the investigation continued, which is in very fact what happened although the media misrepresented and ignored that vindication, preferring to rehash the exploded innuendos.

Keyes and Ryan clashed over the disposition of the case. Then on Tuesday morning, August 3, the District Attorney conferred with Mrs. McPherson's attorneys and Judge Bardin from Salinas. Bardin challenged Keyes that he, Bardin, could overturn any alleged evidence against the evangelist which the investigators had brought from Carmel, and that he would do so if necessary in court. "The leading citizens of Carmel take no stock in the story," the former judge insisted. "Public sentiment there favors Mrs. McPherson decidedly." Keyes already knew that.

Bardin laid massive evidence before the District Attorney supporting his exoneration of the evangelist, including an affidavit, whose text I have been unable to locate, sworn by John E. Considine, a resident of Monterey, who testified that he had, while working on a nearby house in Carmel, seen the McIntires seven or eight times and that Mrs. McIntire could not have been Mrs. McPherson. Considine described the woman as between 23 and 25 years of age,

about 5 feet 7 inches tall (3½ inches taller than Mrs. McPherson), weighing about 135 pounds (somewhat lighter than the evangelist at that time), and having long, medium blond hair. Mrs. McPherson's hair was auburn and not long.

Bardin also presented to Keyes an affidavit from the only witness in Carmel who had ever seen Mrs. McPherson before. Carpenter Fred Horton, another Monterey resident, swore that he conversed with Mrs. McIntire a bit before 8:00 a.m. on Monday, May 24th. Horton was seeking information about obtaining work on the adjoining property when he called at the Benedict cottage. He testified,

"A woman answered my call at the door; she looked to be not over 25 years of age; she had long hair, which was light blond; we talked for three or four minutes; she at the time was not wearing glasses, but a little later I noticed her in the yard as I passed by and she was then wearing glasses which were dark in color; at the time of my call she was dressed in light-colored dress; she talked freely with me, and stated that she was a stranger there, and had nothing to do with the work going on next door.

"Previous to coming to California, I resided in the State of Oklahoma; I saw Mrs. Aimee Semple McPherson in Oklahoma several times, and have heard her on one occasion conduct and talk at one of her meetings; I am absolutely positive that the woman I saw and talked with at the Benedict cottage at the time when I called there on May 24, 1926, was not Mrs. McPherson."

Judge Bardin's partner, Russell Scott, notarized the Horton affidavit. But the authorities never gave this testimony the weight deserved by the only witness testifying from Carmel who had ever seen the evangelist before July of 1926.

Judge Bardin also advised Asa Keyes in that August 3 meeting that already one of the Carmel witnesses was trying

to shake down Sister, offering favorable testimony for a price! Shades of Agua Prieta's Presidente Boubion!

Later in the day, Asa Keyes had to appear with Ryan before the grand jury and outline the Carmel situation. The grand jury insisted the investigation continue. The *Times* reported that Keyes assumed a pessimistic attitude toward the Carmel "evidence" before that panel. Apparently there were discrepancies between the District Attorney's statements there and Joe Ryan's. Reporters waiting outside the chambers heard loud and heated exchanges but could not decipher the disagreements. The two prosecutors laid out all the physical evidence before the jurors. And would you believe it, the grocery slips disappeared? They vanished right from under the nose of the District Attorney! Ryan looked for a scapegoat, and when someone remembered that Mrs. E.A. Holmes had excused herself to go to the ladies rest room, shortly after she was seen studying the grocery slips which Ryan was passing around. The room was searched, but the missing evidence was not found. Ryan later suggested the slips had been flushed down the sewer. For a while a cloud hovered over Mrs. Holmes, but she steadfastly denied the shenanigan, and an investigation subsequently proved she had never had any connection with Angelus Temple. Mother Kennedy, who by this time was fed up with what she believed was Ryan's and Cline's chicanery, lashed out with a suggestion that Ryan could have done away with the slips, an unlikely charge since photostats remained in the possession of the authorities. Meanwhile, Mrs. McPherson had letters from handwriting experts disputing that the slips had been written by her.

Judge Keetch, the magistrate to whom the grand jury was responsible, had not attended the panel's sessions, but he flared with anger as reports of supposedly secret proceedings were leaked to the press. Keetch issued a sharp statement denouncing the violations, then continued to comment caustically on the investigations Ryan prosecuted

after the first grand jury hearing:

"A short time ago the grand jury was permitted to make a simple report that the evidence before it was insufficient on which to find an indictment. Almost immediately thereafter, the columns of the press were filled with the details of the activities of a deputy district attorney, who appeared to be acting in the role of investigator in another city. Apparently without waiting to communicate his findings, whatever they may have been, to his chief (Keyes), he is credited with having given the world the statement that 'the mystery is solved,' with such details as constituted a bald and sordid accusation against a woman who has insisted that a crime has been committed against her."

Two days after the August 3 grand jury session, Keyes fired Ryan from the case, demoting him to prosecuting minor thugs. Ryan's insubordination made the step necessary. Meanwhile, doggerel continued regaling Ryan from would-be poets. One of the "masterpieces" which were sent to Angelus Temple was entitled "Mystery Clues":

*"A woman's been seen with the 'man in the moon,'  
Never mind, we will fix her identity soon;  
Some say, this woman has lots of red hair,  
And they're sure for a time that she's been living there.*

*"Hurry Ryan! Get into your big motor car,  
Rush up to the moon — it's not very far,  
But heavens! The moon has a veil o'er its face,  
And a pair of big goggles has dropped into space.*

*"Go get your subpoenas as fast as you dare,  
No doubt you'll find plenty of witnesses there;  
With field glass and telescope search like a man,  
Look for a bathing suit and a tin can.*

*"Do not be afraid, there's no kidnappers there,  
Only a woman with lots of red hair;  
It's dangerous to mix up with criminals — quite,  
But one woman alone can't make much of a fight.*

*"On this clue will we work — it is not a bit funny,  
But in order to live we must earn our money.  
So we'll work and we'll put this thing over fine,  
With the help and endorsement of Father-in-law Cline."*

Throughout the long ordeal of charges and innuendos Mrs. McPherson remained charitable. Most of the diatribes Lately Thomas put into her mouth were distortions or exaggerations of statements by Sister. As she stated at the time, "When my friends urged me to fight back, I recalled some very good advice a judge gave me after the bad publicity commenced. 'It's very hard to outstink a skunk,' he said, 'so don't try.' " Was that Judge Carlos Hardy?

The mystery of missing grocery slips continued to titillate the public, until on August 12 the grand jurors voted confidence in the accused Mrs. Holmes and recessed for two weeks. The expectation that Mrs. Holmes might resign following her vindication did not materialize. On September 2, Judge Keetch dismissed the grand jury.

Toward the end of August, however, help had arrived in Los Angeles for Mrs. McPherson in countering the Carmel charges. Landlord H.C. Benedict visited the evangelist at Angelus Temple. He and Sister and her counsel met for half-an-hour, during which conversation Benedict stated that the evangelist did not resemble the woman he met as Mrs. McIntire. The landlord declared that he was positive Sister was not Mrs. McIntire. The next day Benedict told Asa Keyes the same thing. The stenographic report of that interview reads:

Question: "You have seen Mrs. McPherson, I understand?" (by Keyes)

Answer: "Yes, sir, saw her yesterday. She showed me all around the plant (Angelus Temple), and explained what she was attempting to do, and I walked around through the park with her, and then back." (by Benedict).

Question: "Would you be able to say she was the woman that was there?" (at Carmel).

Answer: "I could not."

Question: "You could not?"

Answer: "No, sir, decidedly!"

Question: "And she does not impress you as being the woman?"

Answer: "No, sir."

Question: "You never told Mr. Ryan at any time that you could positively identify her?" (Apparently Ryan had reported such an identification to Keyes, just as he'd lied about Collins at the Salinas garage).

Answer: "I certainly did not! Ryan tried his damndest to get me to say I could identify her, and I said I could not."

Question: "He showed you Mrs. McPherson's pictures, or photographs?"

Answer: "Yes, sir. He had a squad of them up there, and none of them looked anything like her (Mrs. McIntire), as I remember. Let me tell you something more. They have been pulling these photographs and saying, 'Do you recognize this?' and another one, 'Do you recognize this?' "

Question: "Your best judgment is, from your recollection and memory, that Mrs. McPherson, the lady that you saw yesterday, is not the one, as far as you can tell, or do you want to say you don't know?"

Answer: "I have seen Mrs. McPherson, and there is nothing about her that leads me to believe that she is the woman that was there."

Mr. Benedict had penned on the back of a profile of the evangelist, "There isn't a thing about this photo that suggests to me 'Mrs. McIntire' who occupied my cottage in Carmel-by-the-Sea the latter part of May 1926." And he wrote on the

back of a front view of Sister, 'This photo does not in any way suggest to me 'Mrs. McIntire' who occupied my cottage at Carmel-by-the-Sea in May 1926.' Both statements were dated August 17, 1926.

Benedict's testimony should have ended the matter, but it didn't. And while, during cross-examination in the preliminary hearing, the prosecution established that the pictures Benedict so marked were taken in Rochester, New York about five years earlier, the fact remained that the pictures Ryan flashed on Benedict were 1926 photos!

Objective reflection would seem almost to demolish entirely the likelihood that Aimee Semple McPherson would initiate an escapade of the nature alleged, staging a drowning stunt to cover a tryst three hundred miles up the California coast. So far as leaving "evidence" behind in the cottage, no one with a tenth of the evangelist's brains would be so simple as to abandon allegedly damning articles. The newspapers, during Sister's absence, were full of her pictures. Rumors located her in dozens of locales, but never once at Carmel. Mrs. McPherson scored in behalf of her own story when she challenged, "Why didn't they (the Carmel "witnesses") come forward while I was missing and claim the \$25,000 reward that was offered for me?" That challenge is unanswerable.

Mrs. Kennedy, who emphasized over and over again, contrary to some more recent allegations, that nothing in the world could ever make her doubt her daughter's innocence of the Carmel charges, declared, "It has been demonstrated many times that Mrs. McPherson cannot be anywhere any length of time without being completely recognized. She is too well known — probably the best known woman in the world — to be anywhere or to make any attempt of that kind. For anyone to suggest that Mrs. McPherson could stroll up and down the lanes or streets of a little seaside resort in California and that for ten days she attended to ordinary household duties and business without being immediately recognized

and her whereabouts reported, is absolutely ridiculous."

The effects of the bad publicity troubled Mrs. McPherson's children desperately. Daughter Roberta tried to withdraw into a shell. She didn't want to go anywhere except to the Temple services where the congregation loved and trusted her mother. The girl cowered in the cellar whenever reporters and investigators descended on the parsonage.

Roberta's younger brother grew most resentful of District Attorney Asa Keyes' smears against his mother. One day Sister caught him wringing his hands and muttering, "I would like to go out and kill that man." "You must not say that," his horrified mother remonstrated. "You are a Christian." Rolf rejoined, "I know I shouldn't feel that way, but I can't help it."

Provocations like this prompted the evangelist to dictate an open letter to Asa Keyes which, according to the notation in pencil at the top, was never sent or released. Evidently Mrs. McPherson had second thoughts about expressing herself so forcibly against a public official whom she felt she had to honor because of his position, regardless of how despicable he might seem in the performance of his office. The tone of the letter sounds somewhat restrained in consequence of the severe provocation. But Sister suppressed it after dictating it.

The evangelist advised the district attorney that reliable sources had quoted him as saying that he "did not believe a damned word" of her story about the kidnapping. She took the official to task for leaking unfavorable evidence against her to the press, while keeping concealed testimony he confronted which confirmed her story. As she put it, "When evidence began to come in in support of my story, all leaks stopped and no news got out and the policy of silence was rigidly adhered to for the first time. Wonderful what a firm hand you obtained all at once, after your powerless efforts before (to keep matters secret), wasn't it? Could it be that the leak was Mr. Ryan, and that he leaked just what he wanted to leak?" A paragraph later Mrs. McPherson reiterated, "The policy of silence seems to be maintained in all things when I

am to the good in any way."

The evangelist had Keyes dead to rights on this charge, for he managed to keep out of the press the statement of Mr. Benedict, the Carmel landlord, who insisted Mrs. McIntire was not Mrs. McPherson. Sister wrote, "You have had in your possession for some time the uncontrovertable evidence that I was not the woman at Carmel." Not until the press got wind of this circumstance, which came as a complete surprise to the papers, did Keyes admit grudgingly that he had this statement. "Why did you not come out with headlines and try to clear my name?" Sister challenged. "Why did you not print Mr. Benedict's story in scare lines as you did the minute your deputized men who worked for you reported to you their 'air tight case'?" The evangelist reminded Keyes, "When Mr. Benedict came and saw me he said, 'That is not the woman I saw at Carmel. I could not be mistaken. Mrs. McPherson was never at our cottage'." Sister expressed her belief that Benedict's disclaimer "was no surprise to you, Mr. Keyes. You know very well that I have never been there" (at Carmel).

Mrs. McPherson concluded this letter, which was not used in the same vein:

"It is a strange thing, Mr. Keyes, that as long as things were against me the case was wide open and you had no power whatsoever over the leak in your office; but the moment evidence began to come in for me and the real truth came out, and Mr. Benedict, the owner of the cottage of Carmel said definitely that it was not I who was in the cottage, you suddenly were able to keep one little word of the evidence you had from going out of your office and to the newspapers and to the world."

The press gave token coverage to Benedict's disclaimer, but nothing comparable to the space devoted to witnesses who "identified" the evangelist in Carmel. And so

far as I know, the write-ups of the case in the after years never mentioned Benedict's statement, with the sole exception of "The Vanishing Evangelist" which alludes to it briefly. If Benedict had lived, and if the case against Mrs. McPherson had gone to Superior Court trial, the Carmel cottage owner would have been one of the evangelist's main witnesses testifying that someone else was Mrs. George McIntire. But the commotion attendant upon the case contributed to a heart condition which hospitalized Benedict in a sanitarium in Glendale and took his life later in Carmel on November 20, 1926. This was a severe loss to Mrs. McPherson and Mrs. Kennedy.

The Carmel charges echoed incessantly in the press through August and early September. Naturally some newsmen used them as a springboard for expanded exposes. The San Diego *Herald* published a scurrilous attack on Mrs. McPherson, which resulted in criminal prosecutions and convictions in California and Missouri, at least.

It strikes some as incredible, fifty years later, that any newspaper feature could be so objectionable that cities would suppress its circulation and prosecute distributors of the material in the criminal courts. Libel suits still occur, though rather rarely, but who has heard of a daily newspaper being banned by the police power of the city. Yet, that is exactly what happened in Los Angeles in the summer of 1926.

The Los Angeles *Times* of August 25, 1926 headlined a dispatch, "NEWS VENDERS FOUND GUILTY." The lead paragraph informed:

"Four Los Angeles news venders were found guilty last night on charges of selling obscene literature because of the sale of the San Diego *Herald* containing an article written about Aimee Semple McPherson. The verdict was returned in Municipal Judge Stafford's court by a jury of six men and six

women after two hours and thirty minutes' deliberation."

Deputy Prosecutor Reames took only fifteen minutes to put on his case against the four defendants, John C. Brooks, Manuel Goodman, Sam J. Steinberg, and Harry Smith. He castigated the newspaper they sold as "a vile, filthy, yellow sheet." Reames only called two witnesses, officers who testified that they caught the venders selling the issue. At first the paper sold for 15¢ in Los Angeles, but the price shot up to 25¢ when it became harder to obtain.

Defense counsel Milton Golden had promised a "sensational defense." When it came turn to put on his case, he called Aimee Semple McPherson to the witness stand. She entered the courtroom through a back door, accompanied by her attorney Roland Rich Wooley. The Court issued an ultimatum to Golden not to question her concerning the contents of the *Herald* article or about details of her disappearance, neither of which, he felt, were material to the issues at trial.

Sister appeared at ease and composed when she took the stand. Golden asked, "What is your business or occupation?" She replied, "Evangelist and minister of the gospel." Golden queried, "Pastor of Angelus Temple?" She said, "Yes." The defense attorney's next question inquired, "Do you know whether an article written in the San Diego *Herald* is obscene or indecent?" Prosecutor Reames objected here that such a question called for "expert" testimony and for a conclusion of the witness. Judge Stafford sustained the objection. Attorney Golden then dismissed Mrs. McPherson from the witness stand. A few minutes later she was overheard saying in the judge's chambers, "My, that was short and sweet."

In his closing argument to the jury, Prosecutor Reames bitterly denounced the defense for calling Mrs. McPherson as a witness "to parade her before the curious" and for



"making a sideshow" of the trial. Reames declaimed, "Mrs. McPherson has been persecuted as no man or woman ever has if her story is true. She is the victim of a vile, insidious thing like this paper." Reames, according to the *Times*, "arraigned her doubters alike" (Part II, page 1).

The judge ordered the defendants to appear the next afternoon at 3 o'clock for sentencing.

Judge Stafford elected to fine the convicts rather than jail them, announcing that "the real guilty party has not yet been brought to trial," an allusion to the author or publisher of the article, which the judge charged "presents an unjust and malicious charge against an unfortunate woman." Stafford claimed that Sister had been "recklessly slandered without the positive proof of any indiscretion." He imposed fines of \$100 each and gave a backhanded rebuke to defense counsel, "She was brought into court, the court believes, in view of the questions asked, of further publicizing her and the contents of this article. A philosopher has said that 'a lie given twenty-four hours start is immortal,' and the court is inclined to think that nothing can ever rectify the wrong done in this matter. The court feels that it would be remiss in its duty if, by the judgment, it did not indicate that this paper which contained this obscene article should not be further circularized within the jurisdiction of this court." (Los Angeles *Times*, August 25, 1926, part II, page 1).

Evidently Mrs. McPherson never saw the *Herald* article. After the jury verdict she stated that she did not have "any idea what the article was about and for that reason, I have no comment whatever to make" (*Times*, August 25, 1926, p. 1, part II).

The lies Judge Stafford denounced, of course, had more than a 24 hour start. Other papers throughout the country reprinted the San Diego *Herald* article. An International News Service dispatch, datelined St. Louis on January 14, 1927, reported that editor Harry Turner, editor of the local magazine, "Much Ado," was sentenced to two years' imprisonment

by Federal Judge Davis for sending improper material through the mails - the *Herald* article he reprinted. The judge also fined the publisher of the magazine, Miss Alice Martin, \$1,000.

What would have been the outcome of the preliminary hearing against the evangelist if either Judge Stafford or Judge Davis had presided over it?

## CHAPTER 13

# Hoax Woman

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"Hear the Hoax Woman tell the truth about the McPherson case," a barker touted before a booth on the Long Beach Pike, an amusement area with a circus atmosphere. This was a short time after District Attorney Keyes, on January 10, 1927, dismissed the case against Aimee Semple McPherson, mainly because, he complained, this hoax woman kept changing her testimony and contradicting previous confessions and charges. Keyes learned, to his chagrin, that the woman upon whom he depended most to obtain a conviction against the evangelist, was an incorrigible liar.

She may have just been a liar lusting for limelight, but the Temple came to believe Lorraine Wiseman-Sielaff was a "plant," a deliberate frame-up groomed from the beginning to discredit Mrs. McPherson.

Sister may or may not have been right in assuming that had she followed Captain Cline's urgings and hired attorney Paul Skenk, the grand jury investigation would not have turned out to be a witch-hunt against her. But there can be no

doubt whatsoever that the conspiracy charges and preliminary hearing never would have proceeded had it not been for the shenanigans of Lorraine Wiseman-Sielaff.

Mrs. Wiseman, as she introduced herself at first, arrived on the Temple scene like a promised deliverer. She marched into an office on July 31, 1926 just as Asa Keyes was making noises like dropping the investigation and discounting the Carmel testimony. The timing was significant if, indeed, the hoax woman was a plant engineered to continue the harassment of the evangelist. Lorraine told Blanche Rice, "I know who the woman at Carmel really was." Astonished but elated, Mrs. Rice took the stranger immediately to Mrs. Kennedy. Stenographer Mae Waldron was present and took notes at this first interview, but Mrs. McPherson was not. Attorney Veitch came in and challenged, "Are you after money?" and Lorraine Wiseman denied it emphatically, volunteering to pay her own expenses in substantiating her story.

According to Mae Waldron's notes, Mrs. Wiseman stated that Miss X was Belle Owens, the sender of the mysterious telegram mentioned above. But on her second visit, the woman claimed Miss X was her sister. This discrepancy alone should have been sufficient to alert the Temple leaders to the likelihood of fraud. Here is one of the few occasions where Mrs. Kennedy's normal astuteness broke down. Probably the circumstance which overcame Mother's suspicions was the Wiseman woman's earnest professions that she would see Asa Keyes, Judge Keetch, Mr. Benedict, and other principals in the case. She insisted Benedict would recognize her, although she was not herself "Miss X." She stated that nobody at Carmel saw her sister, who was confined inside the cottage ill, but that she - Lorraine - was there caring for the convalescent and had been the person the witnesses noticed.

Lorraine Wiseman did in fact contact the people she professed she would. She came back to the Temple claiming

that Benedict had really recognized her, but that he was too great a gentleman to admit it. Benedict, of course, from the first knew the Wiseman woman was a phony.

Mrs. Wiseman made contacts with numerous friends of the evangelist and came often to the parsonage to report on her progress in proving her claims. Because of the services every night at the Temple, interviews lingered late into the night, necessitating sometimes Mae Waldron, the stenographer, staying at the parsonage. On two evenings Mrs. McPherson yielded to Mrs. Wiseman's entreaties, based on fears the woman expressed for her safety (she claimed attempts were being made on her life because of her attempts to exonerate Sister), and invited her to spend the night at the parsonage. Mrs. McPherson gave up her own bedroom to Lorraine, personally changed sheets and pillow slips, then proceeded to sleep in a hammock on a sort of patio behind the kitchen.

Meanwhile, the Wiseman woman managed to get her sister to appear before Judge Bardin in Salinas and swear an affidavit that she, Vera Kimball, was the Carmel Miss X. Later in court this sister denied she had appeared, but the Judge and others swore she was the one.

From the first, Sister's attorneys believe Lorraine Wiseman was a fraud and advised against using her. Mother overruled them, and Sister concurred, because they felt that if her story was true it would blow the case against them to smithereens. "What a silly goose I was," Mrs. McPherson later wrote Judge Bardin, promising that from henceforth she would be a cooperative client and let the lawyers call the shots.

Mrs. Wiseman suggested that Sister pose with her for pictures which would demonstrate a strong resemblance between them, thus making possible the Carmel witnesses' mistaken identifications. Lorraine studiously affected the evangelist's hair style, supplementing her own hair with switches.

Mrs. Kennedy, of course, sent Mrs. Wiseman to Judge Hardy, who also wanted to believe her testimony and thus did not press his personal suspicions to the limits, which wisdom would have dictated. The Temple paid Lorraine's expenses for several excursions, extracting receipts, of course, which later proved the money was no hush money.

The Wiseman woman did not impress the press. Even if she had been the genuine article the newspapers would likely have scouted her story, for the accusations against the evangelist made better and more saleable copy. But this party was decidedly vulnerable, as investigations uncovered.

Meanwhile, however, Lorraine strung a good line and stuck to her guns. She assured Sister, "I have come forward because I must to clear your name. I would be lost and go to hell if I didn't."

But she did go to jail. If she had not insisted on badgering the newspapers she might have escaped arrest. Sister and Mother did their best to encourage Lorraine not to contact the press, but after she told her story, Mrs. Kennedy got on the telephone and pleaded with editors not to publish the account, as employees of the papers conceded. The Los Angeles papers refused to bury the story. But the *Times* began an intensive investigation, and its staff dug up quite a bit of dirt about the lady, including the fact that Lorraine had passed bad checks. The *Times* got her arrested on fraudulent check charges at about midnight on September 10th.

Mrs. Wiseman dispatched a desperate plea to Angelus Temple to put up bail. "Nothing doing," Mother and Sister refused. This refusal ought to carry some weight concerning the good faith of the Temple in dealing with Wiseman. Had there been any conspiracy or collusion, the bail would certainly have been produced post haste. Sister's attorneys turned over to Keyes the note demanding \$3,000.

Wiseman couldn't get bail from Mrs. McPherson, but the *Examiner* posted the sizeable sum in return for a scoop on her alleged "confession" which charged that Mrs.

McPherson had coached her to impersonate her, and that the whole "Miss X" identification business was a Temple engineered conspiracy.

Actually, the *Examiner* footed the bill to bring Mrs. Wiseman's sister down from Oakland, and probably guaranteed the expenses and fees for Attorney S.S. Hahn to represent the hoax woman as well. The sister arrived from Oakland late in the evening of September 12 and Lorraine arrived from jail at the *Examiner* offices at about 10:30 p.m. Just about every newspaperman on the *Examiner* staff was on hand for the interview, she would later testify in court. A crowd of *Times* reporters was trying to crash the gate at the *Examiner* offices but they failed, much to the satisfaction of Mrs. Wiseman who could gloat over the discomfiture of the rival paper which had exposed her.

The terms under which S.S. Hahn undertook to represent Mrs. Wiseman, if she told the truth about the initial interview in court, which on the basis of her future retractions and revisions on other matters makes virtually every thing she said at any time suspect of prevarication, would have been unethical, to say the least. According to Lorraine, Hahn advised that he would not attempt her defense unless she told the truth, but then the attorney stipulated to her - or would "coached" be a better word? - what he thought the truth was. She quoted Hahn as telling her that she had been working for hypocrites, fakers, people who should be in the penitentiary. Hahn described the evangelist and her mother as "robbers, taking other people's money," and continued, as Wiseman reported the conversation, that "unless I did tell the truth that he would expose the most of it as he knew it." Mrs. Wiseman responded to this ultimatum predictably. She said, "I told him rather than lose him I would do it."

Mrs. McPherson's attorneys, who had wanted nothing to do with Wiseman from the beginning, immediately set out assembling evidence to shoot down the hoax woman's charges. Really they did not need to work very hard, because

Lorraine changed her story almost every time she told it, in marked contrast to Sister's unshakeable narration of her ordeal, which did not waver ever in a single detail.

While the *Examiner* was more or less stuck with Wiseman's story and committed at least for a while to accepting it as credible, other Los Angeles newspapers subjected the woman's past to careful scrutiny. It wasn't difficult for their reporters to dig up dirt. The press discovered that the woman's husband had divorced her for "ungovernable lying." Reporters confirmed a rumor that once, in order to obtain fifty dollars as alleged funeral expenses, Lorraine had advertised falsely in a newspaper that her only son had died. Records were produced proving that Lorraine had once been committed to a state insane asylum. And investigators uncovered a trail of bad checks she had passed in the San Francisco bay area. No prosecutions, however, had ensued because Mr. Sielaff had made them good.

Key Temple witnesses contradicting Lorraine's "confession" were to be Mae Waldron, who kept stenographic records of the visits of the hoax woman to the parsonage, and Attorney Roland Rich Wooley. Mae could contradict - and document with notes her statements - numerous details of Lorraine's charges, thereby creating suspicion concerning the veracity of the hoax woman in other matters. The stenographer categorically denied that Mrs. Kennedy had edited materially statements dictated by Mrs. Wiseman, though Lorraine incessantly asked for suggestions. Mother's only advice pertained to grammar and in no way affected the sense of the statements.

Mae Waldron also could swear that Lorraine phoned the photographer who took the pictures of her and Sister together and gave him instructions about retouching them. Mrs. Wiseman ordered him to make the images "as nearly alike as possible." Photographer Fisher could confirm that Mrs. Wiseman herself picked up the photos which she was using and which Sister never distributed.

Indeed, the evangelist and her mother, while hoping Wiseman was genuine, kept doing their best to keep her story secret while attempts to confirm or discredit it proceeded. When they could not dissuade Lorraine from releasing her first statement to the press, Mrs. Kennedy and Mrs. McPherson spent practically the whole day trying to get the papers to withhold the story, according to Mae Waldron who heard the phone calls to the several newspaper offices. The Temple leaders, said the stenographer, were worried about publication before the details could be verified. Mrs. Reichart, a Temple worker, quoted a conversation she had with Mrs. McPherson in which the evangelist expressed her disturbed mind over Mrs. Wiseman and said she didn't need her testimony and would be better off without her. This was before the "confession," of course.

The Temple's attorneys also obtained testimony from Notary Public F. M. Spinning, who sealed affidavits Mrs. Wiseman swore to, that in his presence Mrs. Kennedy told Lorraine decisively that she wanted her to make her own statement of her own free will, and that the statement was not to be made at the Temple. Ralph Jordan of the *Examiner* also told them that he would testify that Mrs. Kennedy made efforts to have the *Examiner* withhold Wiseman's first story.

Lorraine's charges against Mrs. McPherson and Mrs. Kennedy furnished a catalyst which precipitated prosecution of the Temple leaders. Asa Keyes had conceded reluctantly since July 31st that the Carmel evidence Ryan had amassed would not be sufficient to convict the evangelist, and Benedict's disclaimer confirmed that conclusion. Ryan and Cline were now both out of the picture, except as potential witnesses. The buck stopped at the District Attorney's desk now, more than ever. But strong pressures intensified now that a witness was willing to swear that the Temple leaders suborned her perjury. Without Wiseman there could have been no prosecution. When her "confession" collapsed, Keyes' statement in January conceded as much. But while

he credited Lorraine's current testimony, the District Attorney had, or thought he had, evidence enough to get a conspiracy conviction. He filed a complaint against the alleged conspirators, known and unknown, including Lorraine Wiseman-Sielaff who would turn state's evidence. Because the grand jury was not in session he could not ask for an indictment. So the matter went instead to a preliminary hearing in Los Angeles Municipal Court. An inexperienced young judge would be called upon to decide whether the case against Mrs. McPherson and Mrs. Kennedy and others would go to jury trial in Superior Court. More experienced judges managed to avoid the assignment, which Judge Samuel R. Blake had to hear in Division #2 of Municipal Court.

## CHAPTER 14

# Preliminary Hearing

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That the long simmering case would now go to court for settlement came as somewhat a relief to the embattled Temple leaders. They would now have opportunity to face their accusers and their counsel could cross-examine.

Weeks earlier Mrs. Kennedy had exercised sensible hindsight. "The only mistake Sister made in this whole terrible affair was to talk at all, to make any explanation of her disappearance, though her story was every word true," the evangelist's mother sighed. "Because she did tell her story, because she told exactly what happened, she was made herself a target of enemies and unbelievers. Of course, she had no way of knowing it would turn out this way. It was her faith in human nature that trapped her into this awful situation."

At every junction of events the evangelist's sincerity and loyalty to truth kept her from adopting the expedient policy which likely would have extricated her from further harassments. She turned down Cline's pressure to hire attorney Paul Skenk. She took Judge Hardy's advice rather than her

mother's and made a complete breast of her ordeal before the grand jury. And she refused to put up the \$3,000 bail Lorraine Wiseman demanded. At any one of those stages she could have forestalled the eventual litigation. Her mother may have been right that Sister talked too much, but when she talked she told the truth. While Asa Keyes was preparing the criminal charges against her, she protested to her congregation, "As I expect to meet my God in heaven, as I expect to meet my friends and loyal followers, and as I expect to meet my beloved husband, Robert Semple, my story is as true today as it was the first time I told it." Nothing ever shook it. And, as has been stated repeatedly, she never changed it. Furthermore, Mother Kennedy never changed her story of circumstances concerning the kidnapping, even when she came to be estranged from her daughter. Mrs. Kennedy said many unkind things about Mrs. McPherson in the years after 1927 and some things which were palpably untrue - if she really said them and they were not press misrepresentations as was sometimes claimed. But Mother never contradicted one detail of Sister's or her own testimonies concerning the disappearance and reappearance of Aimee Semple McPherson.

After the complaint was issued Mrs. McPherson and Mrs. Kennedy issued statements which sound remarkably restrained. Mother concluded hers with the sentence, "Just at this moment, facing this new experience (of prosecution), I can say that we have only the kindest feelings and best wishes for everyone, whether friend or enemy." Mother wavered at times during the hearing from that mood of meekness, especially when she heard the transcript of her daughter's grand jury interrogation or clubbing, as her attorney denounced it. But Sister maintained her poise and magnanimity toward witnesses who tried to smear her, like Wiseman and Morris, throughout the case, though at times reflecting righteous indignation over testimony which she claimed was false or misleading.



While the Temple had excellent counsel, the nature of the proceedings dictated that an attorney more proficient in trial work be retained to handle the preliminary hearing. On September 17, before appearing to surrender over the charges and post bail, Mrs. Kennedy hired a whiz, W. I. Gilbert. That was Friday. The following Monday, Mrs. McPherson was closeted with Gilbert long enough to give a statement which filled forty pages of legal size paper double spaced. Sister detailed every phase of the case from the abduction to Mrs. Wiseman. The evangelist, thoroughly chastised for being taken in by the hoax woman against the advice and warning of her attorneys, confided her suspicion that Lorraine Wiseman had "stolen a lot of my affidavits." One which she had particularly wanted Gilbert to see came from "a rider who saw with amazement a woman's footprints going for miles across the desert. When he went into Agua Prieta that night he reported that he had seen a woman's footprints and wondered what she was doing away off out there. He recorded it and I had his affidavit, but Mrs. Wiseman evidently stole it." During visits to the parsonage Lorraine had been seen rummaging through drawers.

The evangelist informed Gilbert concerning her physical stamina, "When I walk I outstrip everybody. I am a real hiker. The people who tracked my footsteps for thirteen miles say I did not circle."

Near the middle of September another shack had been discovered in the desert some miles from Agua Prieta, which Douglas investigators assumed might be the captivity hut. Mrs. McPherson informed Gilbert about details sent to her about the shack: "The cottage they have found is about 20 miles (from Agua Prieta), and no one has lived in this house for five years. It has been absolutely vacant, and even the runners didn't know it was there. The owner (of the land) himself didn't know it was there. There were tin cans in it, and everything else just right." The Los Angeles authorities, however, would not investigate the building.

Gilbert took charge with a vengeance. On September 23 he released a statement criticizing the District Attorney's office for having been trying the case in the newspapers. He inveigled: "I am of the opinion that no District Attorney is justified in attempting to mould public sentiment and disqualify otherwise fair-minded jurors by the course of procedure adopted in the McPherson case." And Gilbert had some pointed comments hinging collusion between the press and prosecution:

"I am not unappreciative of the fact that the newspapers — all of them — have not only advised Mrs. McPherson that their columns were open to her, but invited statements from her concerning this situation. Yet statements from her as to the details of her defense would consume pages, and she would be guilty of the great injustice of having pushed the District Attorney from the front page.

"Aside from that, I am advised by Mrs. McPherson that the principal owner of one of the leading dailies called upon her at her home, discussed the facts of her case with her, stated to her that his sympathies were with her, that for years, until the conviction of the guilty parties was brought about, he rested under the stigma of having dynamited his own building and of producing the death of his unfortunate employees. Knowing the sterling integrity of this man, I feel quite certain that he will not, over his own signature, deny the statement. Yet the columns of his paper are filled daily with statements of witnesses prematurely released by the District Attorney

Anyone in Los Angeles reading Gilbert's statement in 1926 would have identified the newspaper in question as the *Los Angeles Times*.

The next day (September 24) Mrs. Kennedy discussed the press and the confessions:

"Surely the public can see that Mrs. McPherson was left without the protection of the authorities which as an American citizen and resident she was entitled to. Because of this and our defenseless position, we have been at the mercy of such persons as those whose alleged 'confessions' are appearing in the press. Surely no thoughtful person will insult our intelligence sufficiently to believe that we would enter into any sort of agreement or conspiracy with unidentified persons coming without any references whatsoever. That alone, it seems to my mind, should upset the whole conspiracy theory."

The preliminary hearing - to determine whether conspiracy charges could be tried in Superior Court - was scheduled to commence on Monday, September 27. Because of rumblings about possible demonstrations and counter-demonstrations, Mrs. McPherson pleaded with her people to absent themselves from the scene of the litigation altogether, a request she relaxed only once, for the day Judge Carlos Hardy testified in her defense. Sister's statement explained:

"We believe it is for the best and request that none of our members or friends congregate either without or within the Hall of Justice during the preliminary hearing. We will know you are thinking of us and praying for us. During the grand jury investigation the group who assembled voluntarily reported a number of embarrassing circumstances. This has led us to this request.

"We understand that some sensational circumstances are anticipated and planned; and that if Temple people are in the group they are to be at least criticized for whatever trouble may arise.

"We will be looking for our friends at the services in Angelus Temple whenever it is convenient for them to be present. And we take this occasion to thank one and all for their expressions of confidence and sympathy."

Judge Samuel Blake gavelled the preliminary hearing to order on Monday morning. Few courtroom observers suspected the case would drag on for six weeks. Ordinarily such hearings consume a period of about fifteen minutes with the lowest men on the totem pole of the D.A.'s deputy prosecutors handling the hearing. Lately Thomas commented, "The legal battery marshalled here underscored that this preliminary hearing transcended precedent" (p. 242, *op. cit.*).

But Judge Blake followed closely the routine policy of such hearings, as outlined on page nine of this volume. Accordingly, the prosecution was given the benefit of any doubt, just the opposite policy from Superior Court trials where the defendants are supposed to get the benefit of any doubts.

Usually the prosecution exposes just enough evidence to get the defendant bound over for trial, reserving the rest of the evidence for the jury. Asa Keyes announced, however, that he was presenting his full case. It would have required only Lorraine Wiseman's testimony to bind over Sister and Mother for trial, but Keyes unloaded his total evidence, appearing personally in the case, an almost unheard of action for a District Attorney in Los Angeles, and associating with himself his two top deputies, Murray and Denison.

Quite often at preliminary hearings the defense doesn't bother to present any case, because it is virtually impossible in real life courts to prevent binding over a defendant for trial. When the defense does present evidence, the court usually disregards it, preferring to let a jury decide concerning conflicts of testimony. In this case, however, Attorney Gilbert presented considerable evidence, not with much hope of getting a favorable decision from Judge Blake, but because the Temple felt that the reputation of the church required an airing of testimony confirming the evangelist's story.

Asa Keyes opened the proceedings with a statement of what he proposed to prove. The following year, after resigning as a deputy, Joe Ryan claimed that Keyes never drew a

sober breath during this preliminary hearing. If this was true -and not just sour grapes over resentment about being dropped from the case's prosecution - Ryan's charges indicate that the chief law enforcement officer of Los Angeles County was breaking the law every day and appearing in court laced with bootleg liquor!

Keyes' case unfolded, as Mrs. McPherson later described it, like a "three-legged stool." On the basis of the Carmel identifications, the conspiracy "confessions" of Morris and Wiseman, and alleged "desert evidence" claiming the evangelist could not have made the trek she claimed, the District Attorney endeavored to prove his allegations against Sister, Mother, and Ormiston who was being arraigned *in absentia*. If the authorities had worked as hard to find the kidnappers as they did to locate the missing radio operator, they might have apprehended Steve and Rose and the other accomplice.

Keyes buttressed his three main lines of accusations by introducing handwriting testimony pertaining to Carmel and the conspiracy confessions, and also with a battery of innuendo regarding hotel registrations where the evangelist always registered under her own name and Ormiston allegedly used aliases. The honest registrations by Sister ought to have laughed the idea of get-togethers by the two clear out of court!

The District Attorney began by questioning five witnesses who testified they recognized Aimee Semple McPherson as being the Mrs. George McIntire they saw at Carmel the previous May. Not one of these witnesses had made the association before Joe Ryan flashed his sheaf of photos and gave them his pitch prompting the identifications. Presumably he badgered them, as Mr. Benedict stated Ryan pressured him. Not one of these five entered a claim for the reward of \$25,000 offered for the finding of Mrs. McPherson during her disappearance, though most of them conceded that they had read about the reward in the press. Not one of

them had ever seen the evangelist prior to the May dates. Only one of them saw her in the interval between May 29 and the opening of the preliminary hearing on September 27 when they identified her. This one exception made a trip to the Temple on Sunday, August 8, stood out in the lobby at a door entering the auditorium, and said he could identify the evangelist as a lady he'd seen in Carmel on May 25 by her eyes!

This witness was Ralph Hersey, a retired engineer residing in Santa Barbara. He testified that he was driving west on Ocean View Avenue in Carmel and saw a woman standing on the corner of Ocean View and San Antonio Street. Hersey stared at Sister, who was sitting beside Attorney Gilbert, and announced she was the woman he'd seen on that occasion.

When Anne George of Hollywood, California, read in the evening papers the account of Hersey's identification, she fired a letter to Mrs. McPherson in which she alluded to Hersey's testimony concerning the detail that "he was driving westward at 4:30 in the afternoon." Anne George declared, "I know that at that time in the afternoon the sun shines directly on the windshield, making such a glare as to incapacitate a person with normal eyesight from seeing things clearly." This was before the days of tinted glass, and the visors cars sported in the 20's would have helped little to dispel the glare at the hour in question. Moreover, there was some doubt concerning Hersey's eyesight. Cross-examination brought out the fact that the witness had worn glasses for twelve years and the admission that he suffered from, as he put it, "Stigmatism" (p. 17, Preliminary Hearing transcript).

Lately Thomas misrepresents the matter - or perhaps he didn't read the entire transcript of Hersey's interrogation - when he reports concerning Gilbert's cross-examination that this witness "remained unruffled and unshaken" (p. 243, *op. cit.*). As a matter of fact, Gilbert virtually destroyed Hersey as a credible witness when, apparently accidentally, the attorney

elicited a damaging admission. In asking Hersey his movements after seeing the woman on the corner, Gilbert elicited the information that Hersey had driven to the nearby home of a friend, Paul Compton. Gilbert inquired concerning Compton's attire, then proceeded, "Now what did you say to him and what did he say to you?" The answers that ensued included the statement, "I said, 'Paul, I think I have just seen Mrs. Liston, who purchased your house when we were here last time.' " Hersey reported Compton's response as the question, "Where did you see her?" Hersey answered, "Up on the corner."

Gilbert interrupted, "Mrs. who?" The witness answered, "Liston," and then spelled the name. "All right; go ahead," Gilbert encouraged. "That was not the woman you thought was Mrs. McPherson, was it?" Hersey answered, "Absolutely."

Gilbert and Sister could hardly believe their ears. The cross-examination had hit pay dirt. The witness was admitting that at the time he identified the woman on the street car as a person he had met! Gilbert suppressed excitement from his voice and continued, "You thought, when you first saw this woman, you thought it was Mrs. Liston?"

Hersey apparently realized the damage he had done to his testimony and evaded, "I did not know who it was." Gilbert pounced, "That is not what I asked. I asked if you thought it was Mrs. Liston. Didn't you just finish telling me that you told your friend you saw Mrs. Liston, who had purchased his house?" Hersey admitted the fact and estimated he made the statement to Compton within ten minutes of seeing the woman. This exchange between Gilbert and Hersey appears on pages 37 and 38 of the transcript of the hearing.

Meanwhile, at the time, according to the witness, Compton told him he must be mistaken, since Mrs. Liston was out of town. Gilbert wrung from Hersey that he read in the *San Francisco Chronicle* within an hour and a half of seeing the woman at Carmel one of the dispatches pertaining to the

disappearance of Mrs. McPherson, but that he made no connection at that time between the woman on the corner and the evangelist. Hersey further admitted that he saw photos of Sister periodically in the press in subsequent days and weeks, but again they did not remind him of the woman he'd initially identified as Mrs. Liston in Carmel.

Gilbert would have scored handsomely with the question, "In other words, if you had not had this talk with Mr. Compton, why, you probably would not be a witness here, would you?", if the Court had not sustained Keyes' objection that the question "is argumentative, not cross-examination" (p. 45, transcript).

Gilbert was curious about the time Hersey began to believe he had seen Mrs. McPherson at Carmel. The witness got this idea, he testified, "two months and a half" after the May 25 sighting. Then on August 8 he went to the Temple to see Sister. He estimated that where he stood at the door was about 150 feet from the evangelist, though the actual distance was in fact somewhat less. Hersey's bias against Mrs. McPherson may have surfaced in his description of this excursion. He said, "I made a trip to the Temple, so-called, to see Mrs. McPherson." Gilbert pounced on that statement as indicative of the witness' hostile frame of mind. If there had been a jury, the damage would have been done. Hersey tried to extricate himself with the profession, "There was no disparaging remark intended" (p. 52, transcript). Gilbert gave him the benefit of the doubt and did not pursue the matter. He had more promising waters in which to fish.

The cross-examiner inquired as to what circumstances prompted Hersey to begin believing the Carmel woman on May 25 was Mrs. McPherson after an interval of about 75 days from the sighting. Hersey explained that "Mr. Moore of the *Morning Press* called on me at the Santa Barbara Club, and we discussed this matter." Gilbert pressed, "What suggestion did Mr. Moore make to you that would suddenly cause you to give birth to the fixed idea that the woman you

saw some six weeks before that on a corner was Mrs. Aimee Semple McPherson?"

A heated exchange ensued between Gilbert and the District Attorney as Keyes objected strenuously. Gilbert pleaded in behalf of his question, "This man has sworn to a story that is entitled to the closest scrutiny one way or the other. I don't want to charge any witness with anything, but I certainly, in defense of my client, have a right to find out a few things about the working of this man's mind who can travel past a woman at 15 miles an hour and make up his mind six weeks later she is a certain woman and before that thought she was another woman" (pp. 54-55, transcript). Judge Blake asked to hear the question read, then sustained Keyes' objection.

The wrangling between counsel during the hearing included mock professions of humility, like Gilbert's, "I don't expect, your Honor, to measure up to Mr. Denison (the Deputy D.A.). I have to explain that I am not a good lawyer like he is" (p. 48, transcript). And later in another exchange with the same deputy during Hersey's cross-examination, Temple terminology intruded, as Gilbert cautioned, "Now, Brother Denison, you possess yourself with patience" (p. 63). At one point Keyes had to summarize Hersey's testimony, "He stated he commenced to read along about the middle of July in the public press accounts of Mrs. McPherson having been or alleged to have been in the city of Carmel, and that at that time he commenced to wonder if this woman who had been seen by him on the street might not have been she." Gilbert asked the witness, "Do you accept that as your statement?" and Hersey agreed, "I do" (p. 59, transcript).

The cross-examination inquired concerning what Hersey saw at the Temple on August 8 that convinced him Mrs. McPherson was the person he first thought was Mrs. Liston. "I found very unusual eyes," was his major answer (p. 72, transcript). He couldn't tell Gilbert the color and he admitted he was 100 feet or more from the evangelist at that

time. He also mentioned a "large mouth." But it was the "large, open, brilliant" eyes which clinched the identification! Hersey volunteered he had never seen eyes quite like that before."

Gilbert dismissed this witness with contempt, snorting the challenge, "I will ask, if your honor please, that sometime during the examination, to have this witness with the court and counsel find out the door where he claims to have stood and seen Mrs. McPherson and ask someone to stand where she was for the purpose of showing that it was a physical impossibility for him to have seen the shape of the eyes, little less their color, peculiar or otherwise. That is all." Neither the Court or the District Attorney would agree to this test. In fact, the authorities in every known case refused challenges which could tend to confirm Sister's story. And when the press proposed challenges which she accepted - as in the case of the examination by a physician to ascertain about an alleged abortion - the challengers usually backed off.

Asa Keyes called Jeanette Parkes as his second "identification" witness. She lived next door to Benedict's Carmel cottage. Mrs. Parkes, under direct examination, testified that Mrs. McPherson "looks like" Mrs. McIntire. Under cross-examination she tightened her testimony and blurted, "I am sure of it." Her husband, Percy, was "cocksure and self-righteous," as Lately Thomas described him (p. 244, *op. cit.*), in identifying, "This is the woman." But both the Parkes admitted that they had caught only passing glimpses of Mrs. McIntire from distances never closer than twenty-five feet and that they never saw the woman without goggles! Of course, they had never seen Sister before and had not seen her in the interval between May and the preliminary hearing. They had read newspaper reports of her disappearance and seen photos in the press, but never connected the dispatches with the woman next door nor contemplated claiming the reward of \$25,000 for her return.

Ralph Swanson testified about delivering groceries to

the cottage and claimed Mrs. McPherson was the woman he met there. But Gilbert forced the admission that nothing unusual had happened in these transactions to fix them in his mind and that during the same and subsequent periods he made many such deliveries to strangers, details of which he could not remember at all. He knew about the evangelist being missing, but made no connection with Mrs. McIntire until Ryan arrived with his pictures.

Ernest Renkert swore he saw the evangelist on May 25 when he delivered a truck load of wood to the cottage. But when Gilbert cross-examined him about his description of Mrs. McIntire, he betrayed indecision about the color of her hair. He had stated that Mrs. McIntire's hair was "blonde" - a color on which several witnesses agreed. But Mrs. McPherson sat in court with her auburn hair. Renkert voiced vaguely, "Blonde or auburn or whatever you call it, brunette, they are all alike to me." Renkert admitted he'd seen a picture of Sister in the *San Francisco Bulletin* a few days before the delivery and that he had read about the \$25,000 reward. He did not claim the reward, indeed, did not connect Mrs. McIntire with Mrs. McPherson until Ryan brought his photographs.

Asa Keyes had other witnesses he expected to identify the evangelist, but four disappointed him. He should have expected Benedict's testimony because the cottage owner had told him decisively a few weeks ago that he was positive the woman at Carmel was not Sister. And while the photos on which he wrote similar disclaimers were established by the State to have been five years old or so, the photos Ryan flashed when, as Benedict put it, "Ryan did his damndest" to get him to identify Sister, badgering him for a whole half hour, were 1926 vintage and thereabouts. Benedict's testimony, however, hurt Lorraine Wiseman, as it discredited her.

Another prosecution witness, Jesse Williams, had delivered a telegram to Mrs. McIntire, for which she had signed. Williams surprised Keyes by denying Mrs. McPherson was

the woman he met at the cottage. The D.A. had expected an identification.

Keyes, Denison, and Ryan were counting most on the testimony of William McMichaels. Up to this time their witnesses were people with only sketchy contacts with Mrs. McIntire at best. But McMichaels, a stone mason, had worked on the property line of the cottage every day the mystery couple was residing there. He had seen Mrs. McIntire several times and at close range.

The prosecution asked McMichaels if he recognized Mrs. McPherson as the woman he had seen. The stone-mason asked that the evangelist remove her hat. Sister complied. The witness looked her over carefully, then replied negatively, that she definitely was not Mrs. McIntire. He later affirmed, during cross-examination, that his glimpses of Sister in court that day was "the first time I ever saw this lady in my life."

"The first time you ever saw this little woman in your life?" Attorney Gilbert repeated. McMichaels nodded assent. Then Gilbert taunted the District Attorney, "Is that plain, Brother Keyes?" McMichaels was a prosecution witness, and the prosecution in Superior Court would have been bound by his testimony. Perhaps Gilbert was licking his chops in anticipation of that debacle for the State.

Wallace Moore, the Santa Barbara newsman who had let Ormiston and his mystery woman slip through his fingers on May 29, didn't help Keyes either. The State expected Moore to reverse his previous verdict, carried in the *Morning Press* on May 30, that the woman with Ormiston was not the evangelist. But Moore disappointed Keyes by refusing to identify Sister as Ormiston's companion. Some have blamed pressure from Judge Carlos Hardy for keeping Moore from changing his tune. Still it took W. I. Gilbert seven minutes on cross-examination to get Moore just to admit that he had gone back to his newspaper and stated definitely that the woman with Ormiston was not Mrs. McPherson. In Fresno,



Moore had spent perhaps 20 hours in Sister's meetings, so he should have known what he was talking about when he reported that the evangelist was not in Ormiston's car.

Wallace Moore, however, probably was the Moore from the *Morning Press* who prompted Ralph Hersey to commence wondering whether "Mrs. Liston" wasn't really Mrs. McPherson. Possibly Moore, by this time, believed the evangelist really had been in Carmel and must, therefore, have been the woman in the car with Ormiston, even though his original investigation convinced him she was not. But Moore on the witness stand eventually admitted that he had concluded Ormiston's companion was somebody else. His testimony in 1926, connected with the report he took to his paper in May, must outweigh his reversal some years later when he announced that by then he thought the woman was Sister. Mrs. McPherson suspected that tremendous pressures were applied on Moore to force his change of story. Certainly as experienced a reporter as Wallace Moore would never have let Ormiston proceed if he had even faintly believed that the woman was the missing evangelist. This consideration seems absolutely decisive. Moore was young, but not a novice.

At any rate, the prosecution's eyewitness identification testimony was contradicting itself. Observers recalled Keyes' pessimistic statements of about August 1 to the effect that the evidence from Carmel was collapsing, was never as strong as the press reported. The District Attorney's best identification witnesses were denying Mrs. McPherson was Mrs. McIntire. Keyes didn't bring Dennis Collins down from Salinas. Collins was ready to swear the woman Ormiston brought to his garage was younger than the evangelist and did not resemble her, though Ryan had lied to the grand jury that Collins identified that woman as Sister. Ormiston had a different woman with him in Salinas and Santa Barbara than the evangelist. That much is virtually incontrovertible. And no one claims the radio man was carting a harem around with

him!

The prosecution had the grand jury testimony of Aimee Semple McPherson read into the record. This recitation filled about 200 pages of transcript. Mother Kennedy collapsed in the courtroom when she heard how brutally her daughter had been interrogated. After the session, when she had recovered, she launched a broadside attacking the District Attorney's methods. "To really realize that Asa Keyes, the man whom we helped elect to office and let speak over our radio, believing him to be a fair man - that was what got me," she complained. "I wouldn't use a dog as they have used my daughter." Mother concluded, "As I see it in their questions this morning and what they aimed to do, if they had stood her up against a wall when she came into Douglas and fired upon her, it would have been more merciful compared with what they are doing."

Gilbert didn't wait until court was out of session to assert his disgust. He thundered, "I have been here at the bar 25 years, and I have heard something today enough to turn everybody's hair gray. The District Attorney with Mrs. McPherson before the grand jury and clubbing her while she was there." Gilbert glared at the State's attorneys and snorted, "Smoke that in your pipe."

Since an interruption in the reading of the grand jury transcript would inconvenience no witness, Gilbert kept demanding, over prosecution objections, that a Carmel defense witness, the Town Marshall (sort of police chief), August England; be permitted to testify out of turn, so that he could return to his duties in the north. Eventually Judge Blake ruled England might testify.

August England had served for ten years as Carmel's town marshall and tax collector. He testified that his duties included patrolling the town generally and looking after properties. He answered, "Yes, sir," to Gilbert's question, "Have you had any instructions or any suggestions from Mr. Benedict to look after his cottage while he was away?" The

defense attorney then inquired, "Directing your attention to the time between the 19th of May and the 29th of May of this year, did you have occasion to patrol that street and look after and watch this particular piece of property (Benedict's) with others?" Again England answered, "Yes, sir."

Gilbert asked, "Were you at the Benedict house during that period of time, and if so, how often?" The marshal replied, "I passed - patrolled there twice a day every day." "Sir? Twice a day every day?" the attorney emphasized. And England affirmed, "Every day."

"Now, beginning after the 19th, did you see anybody in the Benedict cottage?" the question followed. "Yes, sir. I passed by and I saw a gentleman and lady outside the garage door," the police chief testified. "How often did you see that lady around the house?" Gilbert asked. "Well, I saw her after that in the garden one time, and I met her on the lane, what they call Scenic Drive, between Benedict's house and the Ocean Avenue," England answered.

"She was walking on the street?" the defense lawyer inquired. The witness responded, "Walking, yes, in the afternoon." "That was three times, at least, you saw her?" queried Gilbert. Again a "Yes, sir," ensued. "How close were you when you saw her at the house? How close were you to her?" the lawyer asked. England replied, "Eight to ten feet." The witness indicated the time as 8:30 in the morning. Gilbert inquired concerning when the next two sightings occurred, and England located them a few days later.

"Now did she have any goggles on at any one of the times you saw her?" the lawyer inquired. "No, sir," the witness answered. He related that she was not wearing a hat at any time either. The succeeding testimony is lifted exactly as printed in the transcript:

Q. Have you seen Mrs. McPherson since you came down this time at my suggestion?"

A. Yes, sir.

Q. Do you recognize Mrs. McPherson here in the

courtroom here now?

A. Yes, sir.

Q. I will get you to tell the court whether or not Mrs. McPherson was the woman who was there with that man in that place.

A. Positively not that woman.

Q. By "that woman" you mean Mrs. McPherson?

A. Yes, sir. (All quotes from transcript, pages 515-519)

Gilbert smiled at the State's attorneys and chirped, "Cross-examine." Keyes gave Denison the difficult assignment, but not once did Denison question the witness about his statement that Mrs. McPherson was not the woman at Carmel. Earlier that day, in objecting to the appearance out of order of August England, Denison had stated to the court, "We know what his testimony will be." But he did not try to shake it or challenge it when he had a chance on cross-examination. It was almost as if the prosecution conceded England's authority and veracity. The cross-examination inquired concerning other statements the policeman had made to other parties. England volunteered that an officer listens a lot, but doesn't need to say much.

The Defense relied so strongly on August England's testimony that Gilbert did not bother to put other Carmel witnesses, like Fred Horton and John Considine, on the stand. He held them in reserve in case a jury trial followed. The gist of Horton's and Considine's testimonies, had they been needed, appears on page 162 of this volume.

The State called Emma Schaeffer, Sister's secretary, as a witness against her employer. But Emma decisively upheld the evangelist's story. Perhaps the most dramatic moment in the whole preliminary hearing came during Miss Schaeffer's testimony as Denison interrogated her closely concerning Sister's hair. The deputy prosecutor tried to get the secretary to admit that much of Mrs. McPherson's hair was false. Denison betrayed disbelief of Emma's denial and of her statement that Sister's hair was short and thick, coming down

only to her shoulders.

As the interrogation continued, Gilbert ordered his client, "Take it down." "Take what down?" Mrs. McPherson asked. "Take your hair down," the attorney instructed. Sister objected, "Why, Mr. Gilbert, right here in the courtroom?" He insisted, "Yes, take it down." Denison protested, "Oh, no, that isn't necessary," but Gilbert thundered, "Yes, it is necessary. There has been enough of this innuendo. Anything we can prove, we will prove right here and now."

The evangelist removed several hairpins, then shook her tresses down. In a few seconds she gave the lie to reports that she hired a hairdresser to come in daily and take two hours to comb her hair. Without a mirror, she took down and put up again her hair in open court in two and one-half minutes! The hair proved to be all her own and tumbled just to her shoulders, as Emma had testified. This demonstration completely overthrew that part of Lorraine Wiseman's "confession" which claimed Sister's hair was gray and that much of it was false. Lorraine had volunteered that the evangelist, in coaching her, had shown her this to be a fact!

Probably the most upsetting line of testimony to Mrs. McPherson was Asa Keyes' attempts to synchronize her appearance at hotels with those of Kenneth Ormiston. Sister fairly bristled in issuing denials. Walter Lambert testified that just after 10 a.m. on May 18, the day of the evangelist's disappearance, he saw Sister, carrying a briefcase with the name, "Aimee Semple McPherson," engraved on the outside, nearing the Clark Hotel in downtown Los Angeles. Lambert said a man with a limp walked inside shortly thereafter.

Mrs. McPherson told Gilbert, "I never had a briefcase with my name on it in my life." Her attorney, on cross-examination, tested Lambert's vision by holding up a briefcase at the same distance the witness claimed he was to the alleged woman and demanded him to read the initials. Lambert studied the gold letters, then said, "A.E.W." With a

flourish, Gilbert demonstrated that the initials were "A.L.V." instead. It was his colleague Veitch's case.

The Temple would later counter Lambert's and another's testimony about the Clark hotel identification by putting May Dutton on the stand to swear that for some time at the period mentioned Mrs. McPherson was in her presence at Bullocks Department Store where she was a saleslady. In addition, Mrs. Irene Levitt, a woman often mistaken as the evangelist, offered a statement that she had entered the Clark Hotel to telephone at about the time in question on May 18. Probably it was she whom Lambert and the hotel doorman, Thomas Melville, saw. Mrs. Levitt's movements were reported in the *Los Angeles Times* (part II, page 2, October 7, 1926). But she was not carrying a briefcase engraved AIMEE SEMPLE MCPHERSON.

Really, this attempt to insinuate a rendezvous between the evangelist and the radio man at the Clark Hotel on that fateful Tuesday morning is too ridiculous to command serious consideration. If Mrs. McPherson had been there for that purpose, she would not have advertised her presence by an engraved briefcase!

The other innuendoes of rendezvous likewise collapsed. Agnes Callahan of the Ambassador Hotel staff testified she saw a man approach the door to Mrs. McPherson's room there, to be sure, but a member of the Temple was staying across the hall and countered that the evangelist usually left her door unlocked and that she burst in on her at times. Those are quite unlikely circumstances for a tryst! Indeed, if the evangelist had wanted to get together with someone, she would have avoided public hotels where she registered under her own name! Florence Underwood, who occupied the room across the hall from Sister's 330, was acquainted with Agnes Callahan and stated that the hotel employee never once told her about a man visiting Mrs. McPherson in the Ambassador room.

When Asa Keyes proposed to read into the preliminary

hearing record the transcript of Mrs. Kennedy's grand jury testimony, Gilbert exploded, charging the District Attorney with hailing the Temple leaders before that panel to trump up a foundation for prosecuting them, not kidnappers. "You were not looking for any kidnappers," Gilbert lectured Keyes. "You were trying to get testimony before the grand jury to base this complaint on." Mother's testimony was read into the record.

Next to Lorraine Wiseman, Deputy District Attorney Joe Ryan, now removed from the case, was Keyes' main witness. The testimony of "Lyn' Ryan," as some of Sister's bitter supporters dubbed him, droned on through 299 pages of transcript. On page 1048 of the transcript, Ryan declared that "all you had to do was look at Mrs. McPherson first of all" (when he saw her at Douglas), to know she could not have suffered the desert ordeal she claimed! On page 953 Ryan claimed, "Her physical appearance at that time was no different than a person under ordinary circumstances." A host of defense witnesses from Douglas would testify completely to the contrary. Ryan's testimony before the preliminary hearing lends credence to the claim by his next-door neighbor that he had gone to Douglas to "get" the evangelist.

Ryan's bias was betrayed unmistakably throughout his testimony, but especially when he castigated Mrs. McPherson from the witness stand as "a fake and a hypocrite," an attitude which developed according to his own statement from his first glimpse of Sister at Douglas. But why did he pretend for days that he believed her story?

The only witness from Douglas called by the prosecution was policeman Alonzo B. Murchison. Keyes would have liked to have produced Agua Prieta's police chief Villa, but he dared not enter the United States because he was wanted on a criminal warrant. Murchison claimed that in tracking the Mexican desert he found no evidence at all to support Mrs. McPherson's account of her desert trek. He charged that all her meanderings were within three miles of Agua Prieta. Thus

he ignored reports of her footprints up to fifteen miles away and more. Several other Douglas witnesses, testifying later for the defense, would contradict Murchison's conclusions, some of the witnesses being his colleagues within the Douglas police department. Meanwhile, Police Chief Percy Bowden was remaining staunchly as a believer in Sister's story.

Lorraine Wiseman's testimony continued for a week, the third week of the hearing. Lately Thomas assessed, "The state admitted she was their prize package; in fact the conspiracy case pivoted on her testimony" (p. 273, *op. cit.*). Because this whirlygig of lying changed her testimony several times in the days and weeks to come, her latest "confessions" contradicting details and charges in her earlier models, there is no need to rehash here what she told the court. The testimonies of Emma Schaeffer, Judge Hardy, Elizabeth Frame, and others contradicted every salient point of the hoax woman's disclosures, but Lorraine's own retractions and new allegations did a far more effective job of discrediting her as a witness. Neither the press nor the District Attorney's office evidently were able to keep up with Lorraine's changes of stories.

Thus it was probably to Mrs. McPherson's advantage that Judge Blake overruled Defense Attorney Gilbert's objection to the appearance of Mrs. Wiseman on the witness stand, an objection based upon a certified copy from an insane asylum in Utah where Lorraine had been confined for ungovernable lying. The hoax woman's 1926 lying destroyed Asa Keyes' case.

The District Attorney interrupted Mrs. Wiseman's interrogation in order to introduce the affidavit Ormiston had sent him from Chicago at the end of July. This affidavit absolutely denied Mrs. McPherson's involvement in the Carmel caper and would seem to have weakened Keyes' case. Ormiston swore:

"Miss X resembles Mrs. McPherson in that she is

of the same general build and has brown hair . . .

"I have not seen Miss X since the night of May 29th, but I have corresponded with her. I know her true name and her present whereabouts. She has insisted that I make this statement. She is a trained nurse by profession.

"It must be remembered that at the time Mr. and Mrs. Benedict saw Miss X in Carmel, at the time the grocery boy saw her, the Salinas garage man, the Santa Barbara reporter, etc., there was a reward standing of \$25,000 for information leading to Mrs. McPherson's safe return to the Angelus Temple. Also that Mrs. McPherson's photograph appeared almost daily in all newspapers. Yet the only identification made was a negative one by the reporter. Positive identification two months later by these people are hardly substantial. I have sufficient confidence in Miss X to state that I am of the opinion that before any great harm should befall Mrs. McPherson, who is entirely innocent of the matter and yet utterly unable to defend herself, that Miss X will make affidavit supporting mine."

The problem, of course, was that the mere publication of the charges harmed the evangelist. After the first of the year, while the jury trial against Sister was still pending, Ormiston did divulge Miss X's name - Elizabeth Tovey (*New York Times*, January 2, 1927 - 28:3), but the dismissal of the case by Keyes made unnecessary, in the illicit couple's view, Elizabeth Tovey's coming forward, if that was indeed her real name. Following the affidavit, Mrs. Wiseman continued spinning her yarn for days.

Bernice Morris made a better witness for Keyes, especially since the judge seemed to bend over backwards to protect the prosecution during her cross-examination. It seemed that Judge Blake cut off every effort of Gilbert to pry into the shenanigans of Miss Morris and her employer, the

late blind lawyer McKinley - if in fact he participated in shenanigans. A case in point was Gilbert's efforts to question Miss Morris about what she and McKinley did when they went to San Francisco in mid-August. The blind lawyer told the Temple he was going there to negotiate with kidnapper Wilson. The court sustained Denison's objection. A long exchange ensued as Gilbert tried to get testimony about this trip into the record. The judge blocked the defense attorney on every point, but did permit him to make a statement as to why he wanted Bernice to testify about the trip:

"For the purpose of showing the credibility of the witness and for the purpose of showing that so far as this — her testimony is concerned, that she and this man McKinley were engaged in a scheme to filch some money from the Temple people, and I can develop that by cross-examination if I am permitted to go into the proper — as I conceive, the proper understanding of cross-examination, to show the weight to be given to the testimony of the witness or credibility to be attached to her interest in the case. These are my reasons for it" (the question) (pp.2449-2450 of the transcript).

Denison immediately renewed his objection, claiming, "This is neither the time nor the place for such an examination." Gilbert disagreed, "It goes to the credibility of this witness, if your Honor please. I am utterly unable to understand any rule of cross-examination which deters counsel from striking at the hidden motives of a witness. That is the object of cross-examination." But Judge Blake remained adamant. He would not allow Gilbert to inquire about anything Miss Morris and McKinley did, said, or saw during the San Francisco trip.

The Judge and State's attorneys also forestalled Gilbert's efforts to get McKinley's grand jury testimony read into the record in connection with Bernice's testimony.

Gilbert had not been able even to see a copy of this testimony, so he had no way to check whether McKinley told the Temple leaders the truth when he claimed he gave the grand jury the same story he gave Sister and Mother. Probably, however, he did, because if McKinley's testimony before the grand jury could have injured the Temple leaders, the prosecution very likely would have read the transcript into the preliminary hearing record, as they did Mrs. McPherson's and Mrs. Kennedy's. Judge Blake pleaded he was helpless to secure the McKinley transcript, and the prosecution refused to produce it, indeed in effect told Gilbert that it was none of his business.

Bernice Morris unfolded a story claiming Sister and Mother coached her to fabricate evidence. She repeated under oath her previous statement, which Joe Watts denied, that Watts phoned Sister, pretended to be her kidnapper, and reported her response, "My God, is it really you?" Joe Watts' name appeared on Keyes' list of witnesses but he was not called to testify, probably because he was sticking to his denial of making that call. Judge Blake probably should not have allowed Bernice to quote Watts' alleged report of the conversation since that report, had it been true, would have been sheer hearsay. But the Court let hearsay in favor of the prosecution in and kept hearsay in favor of the defense out, not probably from any bias, but because it was a foregone conclusion that the preliminary hearing would terminate in the binding over of the defendants, as usually happens in such proceedings. Blake's relative inexperience as a jurist may also have been a factor. At any rate, Sister had no trouble producing witnesses who heard what she actually said during the phone call from whoever pretended to be a kidnapper, and her words definitely weren't what Bernice Morris' hearsay testimony reported.

Bernice Morris related how she gave the Los Angeles *Times* the negative of the Joe Watts "kidnapper" picture, which Mrs. McPherson denied ever identifying. She read the

document taken from McKinley's body, containing questions Sister thought she was sending to the kidnappers about the first captivity house. This ended with a firm demand for proof, which would satisfy the evangelist "that I am in contact with the same people (the kidnappers). I promise not to prosecute or betray you to police, but must be absolutely convinced and able to convince world as to your actual sincerity" (p. 2350 of transcript). Those who give McKinley the benefit of the doubt - assuming he actually was trying to negotiate with Miller and Wilson in a bona fide manner - regard the presence of this document on his body as indication that he was in fact working on the case that day or night, or intended to do so after returning from the lodge meeting. Otherwise he would have left the letter in his office, or ditched it if he was perpetrating a hoax.

Bernice Morris' testimony concerning interviews with Temple leaders contradicted materially the stenographic record of those meetings kept by Mae Waldron and the stenographer's personal recollection of conversations. Bernice stoutly denied that McKinley told her the Temple had paid a \$1,000 retainer, but allowed that she must have banked it herself, since the Temple had McKinley's receipt, and she banked the money. Gilbert almost trapped this witness with the question, "Do you remember having said to Mrs. McPherson and Mrs. Kennedy that you only had \$100 left of the \$1,000 that was given by them to Mr. McKinley?" "No, sir," Bernice retorted, "I did not say that." Then she hedged, "I might have said a certain amount we had left when Mr. McKinley died, but I never mentioned that they gave him \$1,000." She denied ever asking on her own for any specific sum from the Temple, but Sister and Mother and Mae recalled requests dropping from an initial \$1,500 to the finally paid \$100, for which Bernice refused to sign a receipt. She took the money to pass on to the kidnappers. Her own fraud here should discredit her whole "confession." If the evangelist were conspiring, more than \$100 would have



been tendered! The exchange between Gilbert and Morris about the retainer extends from page 2423 to 2425 of the transcript.

Gilbert denounced Bernice's testimony with the outburst, "This lady has testified she was engaged with Judge McKinley in the perpetration of a hoax, and that is, as I understand, the sum and total of her testimony this morning" (p. 2403). He appealed to the Temple's authorization of the San Francisco trip as proof of Sister's and Mother's good faith in the dealings with McKinley.

During the cross-examination, Denison interrupted with a harangue against Gilbert's attempts to show a connection between McKinley and the kidnappers. In part the deputy declared: "The testimony is between the 19th day of May, 1926, it is undisputed and standing uncontradicted in this record between the 19th day of May at 4 o'clock in the morning and the 29th day of May in the evening, when Aimee Semple McPherson fled from the Carmel cottage, that she had been there for ten days, and all this hoax of kidnappers is absolutely disproved by that statement" (p. 2414). Denison must have not been listening when three prosecution witnesses, Benedict, Williams, and McMichael's swore the woman at Carmel was not the evangelist and when August England testified similarly for the defense! All four of those witnesses contradicted and disputed the presence of Mrs. McPherson in Carmel.

There is a real problem in litigation that the opposing counsel often are more interested in winning a case than uncovering the truth. But here, documented from Deputy District Attorney Denison's own mouth, is a bold-face falsehood.

Throughout his direct examination, Denison had referred to Miss Morris as "This little girl" (cf. p.2416 when Deputy Murray used the expression to protest Gilbert's intense cross-examination). Gilbert satirized, "Of course, your honor, we do not want to be put in the attitude of having

- perpetrated a fraud upon a child with two divorced husbands. But she is here as a witness, 23 years old." Bernice Morris Allcorn Simpson winced. Fortunately for the Temple leaders, they and another witness could contradict Bernice's conspiracy allegations and they had stenographic records to document their good faith in dealing with her. These likely would have been entered as exhibits if the case had gone to jury trial.

The prosecution's final witness, handwriting expert Milton Carlson who worked for the police, testified that the handwriting on the Carmel grocery slips matched that of the evangelist. He was working, of course, from photostats since the originals had disappeared in the grand jury room. The prosecution hinted that Juror Holmes flushed them down a toilet - for what reason the authorities could never explain, while Mother Kennedy came within a hair of accusing Joe Ryan of being responsible. The defense had a handwriting expert of his own who testified and demonstrated that the grocery slips' handwriting had been doctored. Hence they were worthless for identification.

The State rested its case on October 19 - on page 2583 of the transcript. After a five minute recess the Defense commenced its presentation. Gilbert called as his first witness C. E. Cross from Douglas, Arizona. Cross' testimony constituted the keystone in Gilbert's construction of what he hoped would be a massive confirmation of Sister's story about her desert trek after her escape. And Cross came through as expected. He denied decisively rumors that he had doubted the evangelist's account - innuendoes that Lately Thomas echoed without taking the trouble to report Cross' denial under oath.

Cross qualified himself, under Gilbert's questioning, as an expert desert tracker. He had spent the last 20 years in Arizona where he worked as an officer and a cowboy much of the time. He did considerable tracking in Mexico. Gilbert proceeded, "Mr. Cross, have you traveled in the desert and

on foot in the summer months in the region of Agua Prieta and Douglas, Arizona and in that surrounding country?" When the witness answered affirmatively, Gilbert inquired, "What, in a general way, do you know of the ability of anyone to travel 15 or 20 miles without water, based on your own experience." Cross answered, "Well, it can be done, I have done it." After a barrage of objections protesting the next question asking specific incidents was overruled, Cross reported several trips of twelve hours or longer without water in that desert. "I remember one time I walked twenty-two miles when the horse fell with me on the range, just a few miles west of where Mrs. McPherson was," he testified. The hike began about noon and ended about ten that night. "I worked the next day. Did not feel any bad effects from it." Gilbert wondered, "To what extent did you suffer from the lack of water?" Cross conceded, "I wanted water, sure, but I could not get it."

The witness also described a hike in May 1914 or 1915. "I was a peace officer within three miles of where we found her (Mrs. McPherson's) tracks. On this trip I and the sheriff trailed a Mexican from on the Arizona side across into Sonora, Mexico, and south, and on that trip we walked from 7 o'clock in the morning until 8 o'clock at night without water." "What was your condition?" defense counsel inquired. Cross replied, "We went home the next day and trailed the man just the same, trailed him 70 miles south of Agua Prieta before we caught him." Cross testified his feet were not bleeding nor were his eyes bloodshot or lips cracked" (quotations from pages 2605 to 2612 of transcript).

According to the *Los Angeles Times*, Cross "caused a ripple of laughter when he said that Deputy District Attorney Ryan was not looking for tracks when he went out into the desert" ostensibly to follow Sister's footprints. "He got out of the car once and had his picture taken," this witness stated (part II, page 1, October 20, 1926). Cross reflected contempt for tenderfoot trackers like Cline and Ryan. He contradicted Murchison's previous testimony materially and insisted that

the evangelist's condition as he saw her in the hospital, her shoes and her clothing, were all compatible with an ordeal such as she described. He inspected the shoes Mrs. McPherson wore in from the desert and declared, "These shoes could have been walked 25 miles and wouldn't scar up any more than they are there on the soles there or on the uppers in that country" (p. 2618). He displayed his own boots which had covered more territory in that desert and observers saw they were not noticeably scuffed! When cross-examined, Cross insisted, "These shoes show some effects." He declared, "They show that they have been worn on the soles." Then Cross unleashed a blockbuster, "And they look to me like they had been polished a little since I first seen them. It seems to me that they had a little rougher appearance on those soles when I first saw them than they have now" (pp. 2670-2671). Dennison didn't pursue that line of questioning any further. He was in trouble. Cross also testified that the nature of the desert was not such as would affect shoes and dress.

Gilbert interrupted the examination of the witness Cross to put Florence Underwood on the stand. Her testimony concerning Mrs. McPherson's routine when occupying room 330 across the hall from her at the Ambassador Hotel was so decisive that the prosecution asked not one question on cross-examination. The nurse told of entering the evangelist's room on several occasions and noting a Bible and books laid out for study. The two women visited back and forth across the narrow hallway "often," Mrs. Underwood recalled. She never gave Sister notice of her visits. "I just came in, the door never was locked" (p. 2698). Gilbert inquired, "Did you at any time all of that period of time see any strange man enter her room . . . or any man so far as that is concerned?" The nurse said, "No." Gilbert asked about the maid Agnes Callahan, who thought she saw Ormiston at the room. Before the prosecution could articulate its objection the witness stated that Mrs. Callahan never mentioned

having seen anybody go into the evangelist's room.

Cross was the first of a parade of witnesses from the Arizona-Sonora, Mexico border area supporting the evangelist's story. Douglas police officer C.E. Patterson stoutly denied statements attributed to him doubting Sister's desert trek. He had never told anyone that no woman could have made the hike and arrive in the condition he found Mrs. McPherson in when the taxi deposited her at the police station. Patterson reported she was thoroughly exhausted. He also told of finding a woman's footprints some eight miles away from Agua Prieta.

Merchant patrolman George W. Cook corroborated his colleague Patterson's story about the evangelist's exhaustion upon arrival in Douglas. He described her as "all in." Cook's testimony afforded dramatic confirmation that the Temple pastor could very well have made the hike she claimed. After testifying that her ankles turned and she had to be supported when attempting to enter the hospital, Cook reported welts on Sister's wrists - "from friction," he surmised, where a rope or thong had bound them.

Gilbert asked whether Cook himself ventured out onto the Mexican desert to investigate the country. The officer responded that he, his wife, his eleven year old daughter, and his "four year old baby" went out "about eight or nine miles and left our car and walked from the American side of the line, crossed the International fence, crawled through it, and went over behind Niggerhead mountain, a distance of probably two miles" (p. 2744). The trip took about three hours, and this was in July. Cook related that the baby was dressed in summer socks and little slippers. The child walked the entire route except that last half mile of hiking when Cook carried her. "What was the condition of the little baby's legs with those little socks and slippers?" the lawyer asked. Cook answered, "I could not notice anything on them at all - no difference at all" (p. 2745).

Gilbert showed Cook the Evangelist's shoes and in-

quired whether a person could traverse territory like his family hiked and cover "15 or 18 miles and leave the shoes in the condition that those are in now?" Cook answered an emphatic, "Yes, sir." Gilbert asked, "Your baby's shoes, I assume, were lighter than these shoes?" The policeman replied, "Much lighter." Besides they were black which would mark up easier.

When Dennison cross-examined he got smart. Referring to Cook's initial introduction to the evangelist, he sneered, "You knew you were beholding the great Bernhart of the pulpit, didn't you?" Cook conceded, "I realized she was quite a factor in the pulpit." Dennison pressed, "You realized you were in the presence of a great dramatic artist, didn't you?" Gilbert sputtered a protest: "Your honor, I object to that, and if this gentleman had any refinement he would not ask such a question" (p.2751). The court sustained the objection. Dennison got nowhere in trying to undermine Cook's description of Sister's state of "total collapse", as he put it, upon her arrival in Douglas. And his cross-examination concerning the Cook child's desert hiking only served to intensify the force of the testimony favorable to Sister.

The Gonzales' from Agua Prieta related Sister's collapse on their property. Ramon told his wife, "I think this lady is dead." Theresa, according to Lately Thomas, "volunteered that Mrs. McPherson did not ask for water until an hour after her appearance at their house" (p. 266, *op. cit.*). This seems to be a deliberate distortion, for Mrs. Gonzales reported, "She asked for water" as soon as she recovered from unconsciousness. She could hardly have made the request in the long period she was unconscious!

Deputy United States Marshal for Arizona, T. F. Sims, described his search for tracks the day after the evangelist reappeared. With Constable Ash and Police Lieutenant Gatliff of Douglas and a reporter, Harold Henry, he located Mrs. McPherson's tracks as far as fifteen miles from Agua Prieta. Then Gilbert offered in evidence a copy of the Douglas

*Dispatch* which reported that Joe Ryan had "full and complete knowledge and full information as to these tracks; that he knew all about them before he came back from Douglas, Arizona, and that no attempt whatever was made by him to trace these tracks" (p. 2920). Cross had testified that Ryan really wasn't looking for tracks. The newspaper confirmed it. But Judge Blake sustained Murray's objection to receiving the paper in evidence, though conceding the paper "might be binding on him as impeachment" (on Ryan; p. 2920).

Sims described the country Sister traversed as "in places a little sandy, and in places it is hard," with "very little" cactus and catsclaw or things that would tear or destroy shoes. Gilbert asked, "What effect did it have on your clothing as you walked through there?" Sims said, "None at all" (p. 2926).

On cross-examination Dennison inquired, "In your opinion would you think a person walking through there with low vici shoes on, do you think the rocks would scuff up or cut the shoes in any way?" Sims answered, "I do not" (p. 2934).

Why is it that the sensational rehashes of this case never rehearse testimony like this which attests the evangelist could have made the trek she claimed? The authors usually just dismiss the whole idea as impossible. But it could have happened according to Cross, Cook, Patterson, Sims, plus Gatliff, Ash, and Henry who were yet to testify. The prosecution brought only Murchison from Douglas to scout the possibility, and the other witnesses contradicted him decisively.

Reporter Harold Henry testified to seeing woman's footprints fifteen to eighteen miles from Agua Prieta (p. 2958). Over strenuous objections by Dennison, the Court permitted Gilbert to ask Henry a question impeaching Murchison's testimony. Gilbert inquired whether Mr. Murchison told Henry that the tracks found along the road outside of Agua Prieta "could not at all be connected with the turning of the

automobile," whose tire marks were found the day after Sister's trek. "He did, yes, sir," the newsman confirmed. Murchison at that time denied any connection, as also did Cross. But Cross did not change his story.

Douglas Police Lieutenant Leslie Gatliff testified to seeing a woman's tracks fourteen to sixteen miles from Agua Prieta when he investigated the desert. Gatliff displayed the shoes he wore, and they showed no noticeable wear. And Constable O. A. Ash of Douglas described the area as "grazing country rather than desert" (p. 3240) through which the evangelist traveled.

Undeniably the preponderance of the desert testimony favored Sister's story, as for that matter did the evangelist's physical stamina, for she was used to strenuous exercise. The ordeal of captivity did not completely rob her of her endurance.

Gilbert kept Carlos Hardy, a Superior Court Judge since January 1923, on the witness stand for a long interrogation. The jurist swore to the Temple's good faith in dealing with McKinley and read a letter from the late blind lawyer protesting his belief in Mrs. McPherson's account of her kidnapping. His testimony contradicted Bernice Morris' in minor points and Lorraine Wiseman's in major points. The prosecution had subpoenaed him as a witness, but did not call him to the stand. The Judge, whose career would collapse in ruin later when the press learned that he had accepted a love offering type of contribution from the Temple to help finance his August vacation - Mrs. Hardy had hinted it would be helpful - staunchly defended Mrs. McPherson and swore he believed her account of the kidnapping.

After the judge's testimony, Mrs. Kennedy and Sister showed elation. The evangelist felt Hardy proved McKinley had made a real effort to find her abductors. Mother declared, "Now you can see there was no conspiracy on our part, and that the only conspiracy there was existed in the minds of the District Attorney's office."

Another Douglas witness, photographer M. E. Irwin, supported Sister's story. And handwriting expert Douglas Swan discredited the Carmel grocery slips by proving that they had been "altered, patched, erased, rewritten, over-written, and otherwise strengthened" before the photos, which were all that survived after the originals disappeared from the grand jury chamber. Mother stuck by her guns that Ryan had a hand in the disappearance of the originals. Did he have a hand in their doctoring?

Two days before the defense rested its case on October 28th, after five weeks of the hearing, O. L. Shadford, a partner in the Kimball Sales Company at Broadway and Fourth in Los Angeles, addressed a letter to Attorney Gilbert. The single paragraph advised, "Gene Ross, the dark picture artist of the *Examiner*, told some parties last night that she talked with the leading reporters of the *Examiner* and at the trial and they were sure now that Mrs. McPherson was not at Carmel but they had to get her out of the Temple or every one would be going there." Gilbert passed the letter on to his clients.

The prosecution and defense filed briefs on Monday, November 1. On the 3rd, Judge Blake bound the defendants over for trial in Superior Court. Sister dictated a statement welcoming the opportunity to be tried before a jury. At the end she added in her own handwriting the confidence, "There can be no doubt as to the ultimate outcome of this outrageous persecution. It is against all law and order and the District Attorney in his own heart knows this to be a fact."

One thing is sure: within a few days the District Attorney knew in his own heart that he had no hopes of convicting the evangelist, for his star witness, Lorraine Wiseman, went on a rampage of retractions and changes in her testimony. The hoax woman, Keyes complained, after the preliminary hearing "changed her story almost daily." And what whoppers she whelped! One accused Attorney Wooley, who always had abominated her as "fire", as being the real brains behind her coaching. Keyes grilled Wooley brutally before giving him a clean bill of health.

## CHAPTER 15

# "Collapse Of The Conspiracy"

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During the course of the preliminary hearing, Aimee Semple McPherson used the Temple radio station, K.F.S.G., nightly to tell a million or more listeners in California (the paucity of radio stations then extended the coverage) her accounts of the court proceedings. These differed materially from many of the press reports, but you need only to compare her stenographer's transcripts with the preliminary hearing transcript to see which media proved more accurate. The press also distorted the evangelist's statements in these "Platform Bulletins" as they were called.

The evangelist's attorneys may not have been too happy with their client's reports in each evening service. A note from Roland Rich Wooley, relative to the bulletin for Sunday evening, October 3, cautioned, "Do not refer to any one personally tonight, and make your bulletin *brief tonight*" (Wooley underlined the two words). The attorney also instructed, "Announce exact time you will give bulletin and give it on time," so he was making no attempt to gag the evangelist's recitals of details of the court case.

On one night Sister took the time to read a very lengthy clipping which someone had sent her from Honolulu, Hawaii. The press outside of Los Angeles and California was kinder to the evangelist and many newspapers protested editorially her treatment. Whoever sent the clipping did not write the name of the newspaper or the date or page, and I have been unable to ascertain this documentation. Apparently the newspaper was a bilingual publication, because on the back side of the clipping the articles appear in some Oriental characters. The top of the English side identifies the issue as Volume I, Number 290. The name of the newspaper commences: "THE BEE SE-" and from there is cut off. The clipping itself is an editorial captioned, "IT LOOKS LIKE PERSECUTION."

The editorial commences by disclaiming any intention to defend the evangelist's methods and teachings which, its author says "are open to criticism." He proceeds, however, "But when a woman stands alone and faces a snarling pack of human hyenas bent on her destruction - faces them bravely and hurls their lies back into their venomous teeth - then it is time for decent people to stand up in her defense."

This editorial continued:

"Mrs. McPherson has been practically alone in her crusade against the vice that is rampant in Los Angeles and in Hollywood, and in her attack upon the rottenness and corruption in the 'City of Angels' she has incurred the undying hatred of many of the rich and powerful. They had sworn to 'get her'.

"Some time ago Mrs. McPherson disappeared. She says she was kidnapped by parties in the employ of the organized vice ring . . ."

This is not quite accurate. She suspected this, but never announced it as a fact because she could not prove it.

" . . . There were some apparent flaws in her story, according to the press accounts; but no one knows how much those accounts were distorted for a number of purposes, and how much evidence was manufactured by those who had every reason to hate the woman vice crusader and to do her injury.

"The most shocking stories have been published, and more shocking things hinted at in the slimy press of California, and all the machinery of a hostile city administration has been brought into play to discredit the story told by this woman to account for her strange disappearance. Witnesses have been produced who said they had been paid large sums of money by Mrs. McPherson to corroborate her story and to explain away some of the damaging circumstances which the prosecuting attorney is alleged to have discovered.

"A person with little regard for the truth will swear to almost anything for \$5,000. They will even swear that someone else offered them that amount to swear to something else. Even here in Hawaii we know how easy it has been to bribe witnesses to swear away the reputation and the liberty of innocent people!

"The whole story put forth by her enemies to ruin Mrs. McPherson's reputation sounds fishy. Under the circumstances that existed at Angelus Temple there was apparently no reason or necessity for the alleged sojourn at Carmel with Ormiston. Aimee McPherson is not a romantic girl, but a mature woman, the mother of children old enough to be companions to her. If she had wanted a liason with her radio operator, surely she was old enough and experienced enough in the ways of the world to have found natural opportunities right at home, without faking up a crazy kidnapping story to cover a wild party at a popular seaside resort, where she was well known! The suggestion is so wildly improbable that it will take more than the story of a once bribed witness, an \$18.00 a week seamstress, to make intelligent people swallow it.



"The entire attack upon Mrs. McPherson is shameful and disgusting. The Los Angeles scandal-hounds deserve to be horse-whipped from their offices and the newspaper editors who lend their columns to these carrion vultures should be ostracized from decent society.

"If Aimee Semple McPherson were all that these defamers would have the public believe, still she would not be half as guilty of offending the principles of decency as those who hold her up to scorn and contempt. Even if she were a woman of the streets her sin would be less than that of those who place the brand of shame upon her! Surely no one with a spark of manhood in his breast would openly and publicly defame a woman's character, even though he knew the facts that were compromising to her. For such a man we have a word that expresses the greatest degree of contempt that can be crowded into spoken or written language. Such a man we call a 'CAD!'"

During the interval between Judge Blake's binding over of the defendants for trial and the District Attorney's eventual admission that he had no case which could hold water before a jury where a defendant was presumed innocent until proven guilty, the famed journalist H. L. Mencken sampled public opinion about the evangelist in the Los Angeles area. Mencken telegraphed his Baltimore, Maryland *Sunpapers* that "the more civilized Angelenos all sympathize with her and wish her well" - this in spite of the newspaper attacks upon her. Mencken conceded that the prosecution had the press on his side, but on the other hand Mrs. McPherson had the radio. The reporter expected the radio to prevail. "Unless I err grievously," he stated, "our heavenly Father is with her." Mencken enjoyed the meeting he attended at Angelus Temple.

As developments unfolded it seemed that the prosecutors - Keyes and Company - could more accurately be

dubbed "press-ecutors," for they worked hand and glove with the newspapers to keep the drivel they dredged from the sewer publicized.

"The little blue trunk" caper is a case in point. In no way could the prosecution legitimately have entered this circumstance into its court case. So the matter wasn't leaked to the press until after the defense rested its case and Judge Blake prepared to take his decision under advisement. Some of Sister's supporters - and apparently counsel too - believed this was a deliberate attempt to influence the judge's decision.

The odyssey of the "little blue trunk" - if it was the same trunk throughout - reads like a legend. On May 1, 1926 Ormiston supposedly purchased a blue steamer trunk in Pasadena. Two days later it was delivered to H. C. Cornell at the Maryland Hotel there. "Cornell" checked out of this hotel on May 6, after leaving instructions for the trunk to be shipped to Jacksonville, Florida where it would be held until "Ralph Stringer" called for it.

The trunk remained in storage until September, when it was shipped from Jacksonville, Florida to the Cumberland Hotel in New York City where Ormiston had registered as "Ralph Stringer" on August 29. He checked out of the hotel, where the trunk arrived September 12, on September 17, leaving the trunk behind. New York District Attorney Blanton somehow got wind of the trunk and seized it on September 27, the very day the preliminary hearing commenced in Los Angeles.

All this period a frantic search by press and peace officers was proceeding to apprehend Ormiston. But he always managed to keep a jump ahead of the law and the reporters - until he surrendered to the latter in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania on December 8.

The Los Angeles District Attorney's office knew about the trunk from late September. They did not release the news until the defense rested its case. On October 28 the press

blatted that the trunk was en route to Los Angeles from New York. On November 1 the trunk arrived under seal. Each item in it was listed and photographed.

Then a mystery concerning the contents erupted. The New York listing included a sports blouse supposedly marked by a Carmel dry cleaner. Keyes brought the cleaner to Los Angeles to identify the blouse, and - would you believe - it had vanished? Either it was omitted deliberately from the Los Angeles list or it disappeared sometime before that list was made, perhaps in New York or en route.

According to the prosecution's theory the bizarre wardrobe contained in the trunk had belonged to Ormiston's paramour in Carmel. But how did it get into the trunk which was in storage in Jacksonville, Florida - out of Ormiston's reach - from early May to early September? Ormiston and his mistress split up on May 29. Did the radio man carry that wild wardrobe about with him during his movements between May 29 and the time the trunk reached him in New York on September 12 - the first opportunity he would have to pack its contents - if those contents were not already in the trunk when it was shipped to Florida on May 6?

And who removed the sports blouse?

In all probability, this "little blue trunk," which triggered sensational headlines, was just another instance of manufactured evidence of the sort the Honolulu editorial suspected. When I interviewed Mae Waldron in the summer of 1969 - forty three years after the incident, Sister's stenographer of the 20's and 30's told me, "A Chicago reporter fixed up the blue trunk." She added that if she remembered correctly, "His name was Blake." At the same time Mae quoted reporter Alva Rockland of the Hearst papers as having said, "Aimee a good little girl will never get any headlines, and we're selling headlines." Miss Waldron reflected upon how Mrs. McPherson treated reporters kindly even when they knifed her. She recalled occasions when newsmen arrived about dinner time and were invited to eat

with the family, after which they wrote stories completely distorting what the evangelist said. And Mae almost bristled as she related how reporters made themselves at home in the parsonage. She recalled times when late duties kept her overnight. When she and the family would come downstairs from the bedrooms they several times found reporters asleep on the living room sofas or helping themselves to food out in the kitchen!

Emma Schaeffer scrutinized every item in the "little blue trunk; and said she failed to recognize anything that belonged to the evangelist. Moreover, W. C. Farley from Carmel could not identify any of the items in the trunk as among the clothes Ormiston had brought to his establishment. Lately Thomas makes an issue of a certain dress in the trunk which he suspects was the same dress the evangelist was pictured wearing on her departure for the Holy Land in January 1926, but all the picture shows under Sister's cape is the right sleeve, and Mrs. McPherson did not buy exclusive or original costumes. Many dresses of that style, if these two were identical, as cannot be demonstrated conclusively, were manufactured.

Sister scoffed at the bizarre wardrobe, "There probably wasn't a woman in Los Angeles who would have bought, worn, or owned such a conglomeration of garments, makes, trimmings, and colorings as were assembled and described to a long-suffering public. Note the ridiculous, gaudy outfits which would immediately brand their wearer as a freak, circus woman, or an escaped lunatic!" (p. 219, "The Story of My Life," Word Books, Waco, Texas)

Two pairs of shoes (pumps) in the trunk were marked "Wetherby Keyser," a respected Southland brand. According to the Los Angeles *Times* of November 2, 1926 (part II, page 1), Mr. H. B. Wetherby stated that the shoes definitely were not Mrs. McPherson's size and expressed his judgment that she could not comfortably have worn them.

To make the "mystery" of the trunk more bizarre, the Los

Angeles *Times* of October 31, 1926 divulged that one of Paul Rader's handkerchiefs was reportedly found in the trunk by New York officials (part I, page 3). But it, too, disappeared before Los Angeles authorities inventoried the contents!

After the prosecution dismissed the case, the trunk was shipped under bond back to New York where it could be claimed by anyone who could establish ownership. Lately Thomas reported, "There is no record of its final disposition" (p. 325, *op. cit.*). If it had really belonged to Ormiston, wouldn't it and its contents have been turned over to him when he retrieved his other impounded possessions?

About the time he exposed the "little blue trunk," Asa Keyes also came up with a crazy cryptographic letter he claimed Mrs. McPherson mailed to "Ralph Stringer" on September 27. Keyes interpreted the salutation, "D D M" as meaning "Dear Darling Man." The letters followed, "T I F A G W L Y W A H H ! W U F F !" Keyes' decoders translated, "This is from a girl who loves you with all her heart! Wuff!" Another string of initials, "O I L Y D D M I L Y W A M H !" was interpreted, "Oh, I love you, dear, darling man! I love you with all my heart." The letter included "A O W E T H" which baffled the decoders. Surely if they had worked harder they could have come up with something! The missive ended with the name, "J A C K I E ." Keyes pontificated, "The letter was positively written by Aimee Semple McPherson."

Sister laughed the accusation and decoding to scorn. She wasn't accustomed to writing in code and wouldn't have needed to. But she complained bitterly about the Los Angeles *Examiner's* tactics in breaking the story about the trunk and letter. Two of her friends came and told her that this newspaper had offered them a million dollars to betray her. Lately Thomas wrote, almost in awe, about Sister's reactions and that of her congregation on the day she chided the *Examiner*. One of its reporters wrote, after attending the session at the Temple, "She was cheered as no football hero ever was cheered. The enthusiasm was never more frenzied.

She radiated confidence, courage, defiance, and stood before her people like a triumphant empress." Lately Thomas followed this quotation with the reflection, "These were the words of the newspaper that had just fired its heaviest broadside against her, and found her indestructible" (p. 302, *op. cit.*).

Another mystery erupted that very night. At the Los Angeles *Times* building a sudden fire burst out in the photographic room, but the only items burned were a large number of negatives pertaining to the kidnapping case!

The hanky panky which can be documented appears entirely under the control - or at least involving the province - of Mrs. McPherson's detractors!

Throughout November, Asa Keyes released almost daily reports about new evidence he was collecting to use against the evangelist in the impending jury trial. Apparently the District Attorney was bluffing, for in January he dismissed the case against the defendants.

Perhaps the clues Keyes hailed were planted like the trunk. When authorities found Ormiston's Chrysler in Oakland on December 6, they called the radio man's father to be present when they broke open its trunk. The senior Ormiston related developments, "Yesterday, when they opened the rear compartment of Kenneth's car, I was watching them. But afterward, when I wasn't watching, they said they found some hair and a pendant from a necklace. While I was looking they didn't find anything like that!" (quoted on page 312, "The Vanishing Evangelist").

Meanwhile, Asa Keyes was publicizing - "trying his case in the newspapers"? - his intricate theory as to Sister's alleged movements between Carmel and Douglas. Even Lately Thomas couldn't swallow that guesswork which had no basis whatever in evidence, "Against the theory was the indisputable fact that no one ever, at any time during the case or in the years thereafter, came forward claiming to know where the evangelist had been for the twenty-four days

between May 29 and June 23" (p. 308, *op cit.*). Where was she during those weeks? She said she was in captivity. No other witness says otherwise. It's no wonder that the dust jacket of the "Vanishing Evangelist" concedes, "Aimee's story was never shaken." Lately Thomas should have put that conclusion in the text of his book.

The presumption of innocent unless proven guilty virtually demands that Mrs. McPherson be exonerated by public opinion. She was never proved guilty. No jury could convict her on the basis of the evidence presented at the preliminary hearing. The testimony of prosecution witnesses McMichaels, Williams, Benedict, and Moore alone was such that a Superior Court Judge might very well have accepted a motion to throw the case out of court at the end of the prosecution's presentation, without the defense needing to put on a single witness.

The Temple leaders proceeded with preparations for the trial. Sister hired the *Examiner's* Ralph Jordan and also a reporter from the *Times* to help coordinate efforts to get her a better press, if not in Los Angeles, at least in the rest of the country. Mother and Wooley took a dim view of the newsmen's interference in the case, but Sister was asserting some authority now. She was fed up with the press smears. Wooley withdrew from the case, presenting what the Temple leaders - who despite reports to the contrary were not accustomed to high salaries - regarded as an exorbitant bill. They refused to pay it in full. Litigation eventually established an amount.

The Temple leaders replaced Wooley with Jerry Giesler - the lawyer who later inspired Erle Stanley Gardner to create Perry Mason. Gilbert remained chief counsel, but probably would have used Giesler in court trial work. He did not use Wooley or Veitch in the preliminary hearing. Gilbert there handled all the questioning himself. Giesler would have made mincemeat of Ralph Hersey and the other Carmel witnesses in cross-examination had the case gone to jury trial, and

Wiseman, Murchison, Ryan, and Morris probably would have fared even worse.

Rumors began circulating in December that the case might be dismissed. By the first of January the public expected the prosecution to collapse. Keyes was reversing himself, one day promising prosecution, the next day doubting a trial.

Then the press of the nation carried Kenneth G. Ormiston's identification of his Carmel companion. Throughout the case he'd denied emphatically that she was the Temple pastor. Now he named her as "Elizabeth Tovey, a nurse from Seattle" (*New York Times*, January 2, 1928, p. 3). Ormiston told investigators that he brought Elizabeth Tovey to the Virginia Hotel in Santa Barbara, California on the night of May 29, 1926, when he and she separated.

The fact was ascertained that an Elizabeth Tovey had in fact registered at that hotel following the encounter of Ormiston and "Miss X" with reporter Wallace Moore. Charles Maas, proprietor of the hotel, came to Los Angeles on January 3 to testify about the woman's identity before the grand jury. He told reporters that the woman Ormiston brought to his hotel was not Aimee Semple McPherson, as the *Los Angeles Times* stated (January 3, 1927, part II, p. 18). An International News Service dispatch of the same date carried Maas' emphatic quotation, "I have seen Mrs. McPherson, the evangelist, hundreds of times, and I saw Elizabeth Tovey come into the hotel and register that night. I am positive that Mrs. McPherson is not the woman who came to my hotel at Santa Barbara."

Meanwhile, authorities confiscated the hotel register for handwriting comparison. Evidently Elizabeth Tovey's did not resemble Mrs. McPherson's, otherwise there would have erupted another hullabaloo of publicity. The *New York Times* of January 2, in which Ormiston divulged the Tovey name, reported that he and she quarreled in Santa Barbara and that he returned to the north after separating from her there. His

affidavit from Chicago the previous July 31 had stated that he had not seen Miss X since May 29.

Rumors surfaced that a Temple pay-off was prompting Keyes to dismiss the case. The sum of \$30,000 was bandied about. Later investigations of Keyes' office turned up irregularities which imprisoned the District Attorney (Sister would later visit him at San Quentin Penitentiary and wish him well), but these indiscretions or crimes were connected with other cases than the McPherson prosecution.

Keyes dismissed the case on January 10, the last day he could have entered information for prosecution in Superior Court. In his statement Keyes conceded that it was the hoax woman's confession that got the case into court in the first place. He said, "Without her testimony, proof of the alleged conspiracy is impossible. Since the preliminary hearing, Mrs. Wiseman has changed her story almost daily, until it now contains so many contradictions and inconsistencies to the one given in court that she has become a witness for whose truth and credibility no prosecutor could vouch."

Sister likened the District Attorney's dilemma with false witnesses to the confounding of tongues at the tower of Babel.

If Asa Keyes had been a gallant gentleman, he would have dismissed the case against the evangelist and made no derogatory remarks against her. But his prejudices prompted him to reassert his belief in her guilt. His only regret was that he couldn't prove it. But if he couldn't prove it, doesn't American justice afford the presumption of her innocence?

Asa Keyes also answered public outcries about the expenditure of massive sums of public monies to get evidence against the evangelist and take her to court with the revelation that the hundreds of thousands of dollars rumored spent on the case was sheer fiction. Only about \$5,000 of public funds had been invested. The newspapers had put up the rest of the cost! "Press-ecutor" Keyes, shouldn't we call

him?

The scene which greeted Aimee Semple McPherson upon her appearance in Angelus Temple that night of January 10, 1927 defies description. For the only time in her career she failed to control an audience. Her gestures for silence were completely ignored in the boisterous demonstration which shook the church. People hollered at the tops of their voices. The thunderous applause was almost deafening. Some tooted horns, showered confetti from the balconies, and unleashed serpentine as on New Year's eves. The band members blew their horns. The jubilee was indescribable. Such a scene probably never took place in any church in the world as unfolded that night of the pastor's vindication. Judge Hardy was ecstatic. Judge Jacob Denney submitted an article published in the February "Bridal Call" (the evangelist's magazine), entitled, "Collapse of the Conspiracy." The retired jurist from Indiana commenced, "Peace once more reigns. The poisonous gases from the last bursting shell have lifted. The scattered horde of character assassins are slinking back to their foul caverns where the bats of envy, spite, and malevolence foregather, there to vent their spleen at being baffled of a prey that they had thought to lay helpless within their polluted grasp." Judge Denney hailed the dismissal of the case by the District Attorney as a far more telling vindication even than an acquittal by a jury would have been. A prosecutor might have disagreed with a jury's verdict, but Asa Keyes admitted he didn't have the evidence to convict the Temple leaders!

## CHAPTER 16

# The Defense Rests

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Hamilton Burger could have defeated Perry Mason if somehow the fictional opponents had been able to switch roles, putting Perry in the prosecutor's place and Burger as defense counsel, in a court duel over the charges real life Asa Keyes prosecuted against Aimee Semple McPherson.

On the basis of available evidence, when it is all weighed, it is possible to state not only that a jury would have had to acquit because the prosecution could not prove her guilty beyond a reasonable doubt, but also that the facts of the case, divorced from rumors and innuendoes and exploded accusations, prove the evangelist and her mother innocent beyond any reasonable doubt.

Burger would have won hands down with the evidence Gilbert had. Mason would have lost big with the evidence Keyes had.

No claim of Aimee Semple McPherson concerning her disappearance is independently impossible. The unlikelihood of such an incongruous concatenation of events being fit together is in and of itself a demonstration of the

truthfulness of her story. Had she been faking she would have invented a far more believable yarn.

She said she was kidnapped. Others have been kidnapped. Kidnapping is an infrequent crime, but it does happen. If the stories of other kidnapping victims had been treated as the Los Angeles authorities treated the evangelist's, few if any kidnappers would ever be apprehended. Moreover, threats of kidnapping had been levelled at the evangelist in 1925.

The circumstances of the disappearance are believable. Often Sister was accosted to minister to the sick. Her routine was interrupted not only at the Temple but when horseback riding and on other errands or recreational outings. This is what happened at the beach. Steve and Rose snatched Sister.

Ransom notes — real or pretended — fail to shake Mrs. Kennedy's certainty of drowning. Only the evangelist's own voice over the wire from Douglas convinced Mother that her daughter was alive. These circumstances seem credible.

Sister proved four times in demonstrations after her return that she was capable of sawing the ropes binding her wrists without cutting herself. How much more proof is needed?

Witnesses on the scene in Douglas testified emphatically, as did the Gonzales' in Agua Prieta, that Sister was in a state of collapse upon arrival. Ryan and Cline did not arrive until Thursday from Los Angeles, by which time the evangelist's physical vigor had begun to reassert itself, but other witnesses claim she still looked in bad shape. Her wrists had welts from bonds. Her feet were blistered. Even after the return to Los Angeles on Saturday, the *Examiner* photo carried a caption calling attention to details of her features which exhibited the ordeal she'd suffered.

Desert trackers testified that Cline and Ryan really were not looking for footprints when they toured the Mexican desert by car on Friday. But others found her tracks up to



eighteen miles from Agua Prieta. Where her tracks were, she must have been! And those tracks should be sufficient to establish that she was there even if her condition upon reaching Douglas had been even better than Ryan claimed!

Was the shack ever found? It may well have been, though this is disputed. It's possible the evangelist's upset condition after weeks of captivity distorted her memory of details, so that her description was less than totally accurate. It's possible, on the other hand, that the kidnappers dismantled the shack or that it was a temporary structure, perhaps somewhat portable. Steve had time to erect such a shelter during the period he was gone from the first captivity house and the time Rose and — let's call him Wilson — brought the evangelist to the second hut. And it is also possible that one of the shacks the trackers discovered that summer may have been the captivity shelter in Mexico. Many shacks were discovered in that area which no one knew about before.

Ryan and Murchison testified that no one could have made the trek Mrs. McPherson claimed and arrive in clothes and shoes in the condition her's were when she reached Douglas. But hosts of desert people gave the lie to that fiction, and proved their point by displaying their own garments and footwear.

If you once grant the likelihood that there was an abduction, there is no circumstance in Sister's story which is not compatible with possibility.

Now for the Carmel evidence. Keyes had no more on September 27 when he started the preliminary hearing than he had on August 1 when he claimed that evidence had collapsed. None of Keyes' identification witnesses had the opportunity to observe Mrs. McIntire at Carmel as closely as did Town Marshall August England who testified Sister was positively not that woman, except for William McMichaels, the stonemason on the property line who also denied the evangelist was the Carmel woman he saw often. Ralph

Hersey thought the woman he saw was Mrs. Liston. The identifications Ryan forced by flashing pictures all break down upon close scrutiny. Most of those witnesses never had a chance closely to scrutinize Mrs. McIntire. Benedict was positive she was not the evangelist. So was Considine, Horton and Williams. Why didn't any of the others claim the reward they knew about?

Meanwhile, Dennis Collins saw someone other than Sister with Ormiston in Salinas during the period in question. Possibly Miss X was the same woman who registered with Ormiston as his wife in February at a Venice, California hotel. That couldn't have been Aimee Semple McPherson, because she was in Europe at the time. Yet at that time scandalous rumors circulated to the effect that Ormiston was abroad with the evangelist. Someone started those rumors. Was it the beginning of a plot to discredit the Temple pastor? The Avengers' letter threatened to blacken her reputation. Even if the ransom had been paid, that might have been only a diversion on the part of the kidnappers who could have released Sister under circumstances which would have made her story sound incredible anyway. Thus they would have their money and have gotten her, too.

There is not any evidence to connect Joe Ryan and Herman Cline with such a plot, just the allegations of their bootlegging protection associations, which could be untrue. But the statement Ryan's neighbor attributed to him on the day he left for Douglas — that the deputy was going there to "get" Mrs. McPherson — affords support to those who want to suspect Ryan's involvement in a vicious conspiracy against the evangelist.

Asa Keyes denounced his "confession" woman, Lorraine Wiseman-Sielaff sufficiently to dispel any need for discussion here. Her obvious lies about Mrs. McPherson's hair and the evangelist's alleged coaching of her to duplicate its style cast doubts on every other allegation about the coaching charged. And Bernice Morris' alleged underworld

connections and admitted framing of evidence in the Joe Watts picture, plus Watts' disavowal of the phone call Bernice reported, rob the legal secretary's testimony of credence.

The facts seem plain. The desert escape and hike were proved possible. Mrs. McPherson insisted she made them. She certainly could have made them, so why not believe her? The Carmel Miss X was certainly somebody else. Why not take Ormiston's word that it was Elizabeth Tovey? In view of Mrs. McPherson's repeated denunciations of the radio man while he was a fugitive, Ormiston would have had no reason to lie to protect her. He could have made a mint out of a "confession" sold to the press, far more than he received for the one he sold a Los Angeles newspaper identifying his companion as Elizabeth Tovey.

The hotel associations the prosecution postulated proved to be without foundation. No witness authoritatively linked Sister and Ormiston at any of the inns. If they were in the same hotel, it was doubtless coincidental — unless as Wooley suspected, Ormiston was in cahoots with the kidnapers and conspired to leave a trail to embarrass Sister. Ormiston went to his grave with his denial of this association intact.

The only story in the whole affair which remained stable was that of Aimee Semple McPherson. The District Attorney could not prove her guilty in 1926 and 1927. But the media has been proclaiming her guilty ever since. A case in point is the *Readers' Digest's* "Family Encyclopedia of American History." On page 705, under the evangelist's name, this "reference book" states categorically, "Her reputation was badly compromised by scandal when she falsely claimed to having been kidnapped rather than admit openly to having had a secret tryst." Whoever wrote that reported lies as facts. Yet many will believe those lies because they are backed by the authority of the *Readers' Digest*!

It's time that the truth be known. If the charges against Mrs. McPherson are to be rehashed in the press, shouldn't

the facts in her favor at least be given equal exposure? They never have been, not in 1926, not since then, not now. If mentioned at all, they trail the sensational rumors and accusations and claim but a fraction of the space the unfavorable materials command. What is the policy of American justice? Should the media — which went so far as to lie that an operating telephone was kept installed in her coffin — be able to get away with reversing the American judicial policy from "innocent till proven guilty" to "guilty until proven innocent," as has happened in the McPherson kidnapping coverage? Actually, the situation may be "guilty even after proven innocent" in this case, for if ever a defendant produced evidence sufficient to command exoneration, Mrs. McPherson did.

Asa Keyes was almost a prophet when, upon throwing in the towel, he said in effect that he was submitting the case to "the court of human opinion." He evidently sized up the situation accurately when he anticipated that eventually the public would accept the guilt of the evangelist, although in 1927 public opinion was solidly in her favor, as Mencken and others observed. Judge Stafford's words, quoting a philosopher, that a lie with an hour's head start have turned out to be a masterpiece of understatement. Some lies in this case have a fifty year start! It's time the truth challenges them.

Aimee Semple McPherson said she was kidnapped. Compare her character and ministry with those of her detractors. Her career had been tarnished by not a whisper of scandal in her seventeen year ministry up to 1926. She continued for another eighteen years with her preaching and social service ministries in spite of innuendoes and scandals which the kidnapping case charges unleashed as from a Pandora's box. During the depression, her commissary fed and clothed over a million and a half of Los Angeles' needy — without question about race or creed. It's positively unthinkable that she would have staged a drowning stunt to cover an affair! But no other motive has ever been seriously

pressed to contradict her story. The only credible explanation of her disappearance is that she was kidnapped as she said. She proved herself innocent beyond a reasonable doubt.

The defense rests.

## CHAPTER 17

# The Last Word

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The 1926 kidnapping of Aimee Semple McPherson certainly affected the course of her career. Through the years some segments of the media have misrepresented the effects as diminishing her ministry. For example, the "*Reader's Digest Encyclopedia*" stated that after the "scandal" of the kidnapping "her following dwindled" (page 705). Nothing could be further from the truth. Five years after the kidnapping Mrs. McPherson herself told reporters covering her October 1931 revival in Boston, Massachusetts, which many hailed at the time as "the greatest evangelistic meeting the world has ever known," that after her ordeal her church "trebled."

Nowadays the religious media, at least, is giving the evangelist a better press. Edward E. Plowman, in his article about the Golden Jubilee Convention of the Foursquare Church which *Christianity Today* entitled, "In Love With Aimee," much to the distress of many who felt that it should have been captioned, "In Love With Jesus," wrote, "The evangelist was kidnapped and held in Mexico and she managed to escape. The Los Angeles district attorney and

the press, however, seemed bent on proving it was all a lie to cover up her involvement in a romantic scandal. She was later vindicated" (March 30, 1973, page 50).

Mrs. McPherson died on September 27, 1944. Cynics gloated that soon her Foursquare organization would "come apart at the seams." It did not, but rather grew. Donald Gee, who had long been quite critical of Mrs. McPherson's "notoriety," stated five years after her death, "Many prophesied, and who can blame them, that the work had been founded upon her personality, but if we accept our Lord's test that, 'by their fruits ye shall know them,' the results are all in her favor, for the work has only deepened and increased in every way since her death, and the undernably good fruit is there" (page 215, "The Pentecostal Movement," London, 1949).

Since Donald Gee wrote that statement, the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel has continued with phenomenal growth under the leadership of the founder's son, Dr. Rolf K. McPherson. When his mother passed away, there were about four hundred Foursquare churches in the United States and Canada and two hundred foreign mission stations. Twenty years later the movement had grown to about seven hundred fifty American churches and more than twelve hundred congregations in the rest of the world. In 1983, American and Canadian churches totaled almost twelve hundred while foreign congregations about eight thousand. Membership in 1983 exceeded one hundred sixty thousand in the homeland, with a worldwide constituency of almost five hundred fifty thousand. Gross valuation of properties owned by the movement has increased from about ten million dollars in 1944 to three hundred and three million in 1982. Converts worldwide in the one year of 1982 numbered three hundred and four thousand. The church operates parochial schools, Bible institutes, colleges, orphanages, radio stations and campgrounds.

Ed Plowman wrote regarding 1973 statistics that "Sister Aimee would have gotten excited over the reports" (ibid.).

How much more excited would she be a decade later! The Foursquare church is reputedly the fastest growing church in the Philippine Islands and the largest Protestant denomination in certain Latin American countries.

The ministry of Aimee Semple McPherson, her associates and successors, has contributed enormous resources of personnel to other Christian movements, leaders who got their start or training or eminence under Foursquare auspices. Dr. N.D. Davidson, who retired in the late 1970s after serving many years as the Oregon District Superintendent for the Assemblies of God, told me, "I might have gone to hell if it had not been for Sister McPherson." Davidson was converted in one of her meetings in Southern California and held several offices in the Santa Paula Foursquare church before going to his subsequent affiliation.

Sidney Correll of United World Missions, musician Paul Mickelson who left Angelus Temple to become Billy Graham's Crusade organist in the 1950s, singer-missionary Norman Nelson, Hubert Mitchell, Roy McKeown, Chuck Smith of Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa, and Dean Miller who was President Eisenhower's pastor at a Presbyterian church in Palm Springs, California, are among hundreds of names of ministers of renown who began their careers in the Foursquare movement. On the other hand, some who at first gave promise under Mrs. McPherson of great usefulness to the cause of Christ abandoned Christian work altogether.

The now celebrated motion picture actor, Anthony Quinn, is one. As a teenager, Anthony professed conversion and joined Angelus Temple after his grandmother, Oaxaca, was healed of a critical illness when Aimee Semple McPherson came to the Quinn shack to pray for the sufferer. He remained active for a time in the church and to this day looks back with nostalgia on the association. "I preached for Aimee Semple McPherson," he has told national television audiences. And Quinn continues quick to counter criticisms he hears against the evangelist. He remains a strong fan of

Mrs. McPherson.

A number of prominent figures in Hollywood's film industry showed a fascination with Mrs. McPherson's ministry through the years. The evangelist was a great comfort to Mrs. Alexander Pantages. Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks and Charlie Chaplin, among others, attended her services at Angelus Temple from time to time. Charlie Chaplin came backstage after one of her illustrated sermons and suggested that the Temple install a proscenium arch to facilitate the audience's perception of the dramatizations. His suggestion was soon implemented.

While the church has been growing phenomenally since the evangelist's death, libels defaming Mrs. McPherson have continued multiplying. One fiction concerns the amount of her estate. In the *Northwest Today* Sunday magazine of the *Seattle Post-Intelligence* of November 8, 1970, the question and answer feature, "PEOPLE etc.," carried a query about how much Aimee Semple McPherson was worth when she died. The answer given was that she "left property valued at \$59 million to her son and \$10 million to her mother." She actually left an estate which hardly exceeded \$10,000. She had put everything into the church and kept virtually nothing for herself.

Another fantastic fabrication has been the report often repeated (cf. the television program "Hollywood Squares," July 3, 1972, besides many Sunday supplement magazines) that an operating telephone is installed in Mrs. McPherson's coffin. The media regurgitates this ridiculous falsehood periodically in spite of repeated denials by the cemetery, the telephone company and the denomination.

Perhaps the most flagrant fiction of all libelling the evangelist since her death appears in Milton Berle's latest autobiography. After a benefit entertainment in 1930 which he claims starred both himself and the evangelist at the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles, Berle represents that she lured him to her apartment twice and seduced him. On a table

beside the bed, he declared, was a crucifix and candles, which he handled, he says, by not looking at it. This portrayal is not mentioned in his earlier book, *Laughingly Yours*, which has some autobiographical content and was published in 1939 during the lifetime of the evangelist.

Some acquaintances who would like to believe the worst about Mrs. McPherson have told me, "We want to believe the story, but that bit about the crucifix convinces us it cannot be true."

There are other reasons why the story cannot be true. Mrs. McPherson's daughter, Roberta Salter of New York, told me, "Mother never had an apartment in her life." And by 1931 she kept herself securely chaperoned to guard against such allegations. Furthermore, the year 1930 is one in which we can trace the evangelist's appearances and whereabouts almost every day. She was incapacitated with illness a full five months of that year, and there is no place in her schedule, as reported in her publications and church and travel records, for any such benefit. Besides, Roberta also told me, "Mother never did a benefit in her life. She had her own charities."

The charities the evangelist organized and operated included the Angelus Temple Commissary where anyone could receive food, clothing, job information, and other assistance no matter what was his race, creed, or religion. Hundreds of times the Los Angeles Fire Department and Police Department brought or referred to the commissary destitute families who could not find help elsewhere. Between the time the commissary opened and the evangelist died, it had fed and clothed more than one-and-one-half million persons.

One of the beneficiaries was the family of Richard Halverson who would become Chaplain of the United States Senate in 1981. On February 15, 1971, this then pastor of a prominent Washington, D.C. area Presbyterian church told an Angelus Temple convention audience: "In 1935 I came to

Los Angeles with my family. We had driven all the way from North Dakota. We had just enough money left to make the first month's rent on an apartment. When we put that down we were flat broke. We literally didn't have another penny. I was nineteen. We didn't have anything to eat. The Echo Apartments' manager said, 'Why don't you come down to Angelus Temple? They'll give you something to eat.' My mother came down here. I came with her. We went to your commissary. They loaded us down with groceries. And we lived off Angelus Temple that first month. You took care of us. You loved us. Then mother was given a job in the commissary, and so the rest of the time we were here she worked there and at least earned our food. Well, when we lived at the Echo Apartments we were here in Angelus Temple nearly every Sunday. And I had the privilege and pleasure of hearing Sister Aimee Semple McPherson preach many, many times in this place. So I can tell you that I am greatly honored to be in this pulpit."

The Angelus Temple commissary continues in operation.

At a subsequent International Foursquare Convention at Angelus Temple, Dr. Robert H. Schuller, pastor of the Crystal Cathedral in Garden Grove, California, told delegates of an occasion when he landed late one night at Los Angeles International Airport where he had left his car parked. In driving home he tuned his dial and stopped at a radio station carrying a sermon by a woman preacher whose voice he did not recognize. He got more and more excited as he listened to the message. He exclaimed, "I want to get that woman to preach at my church." At the end of the sermon he learned he was listening to Angelus Temple's radio station KFSG and hearing the voice of the long deceased evangelist, Aimee Semple McPherson, whose sermons continue to be broadcast periodically by recording and are available on cassette tape.

Brickbats also were frequently aimed at the evangelist,

but they often boomeranged. Donald Gee wrote, "She was fiercely attacked, perhaps more fiercely than any other contemporary evangelist. But it is significant that those who went out of the way to attack her always went down, while she and her work remained" (op. cit. page 121).

"Lately Thomas," in a chapter called "Coda," chronicled the debacles in the public careers of those who spearheaded the case against the evangelist concerning the kidnapping, especially District Attorney Asa Keyes, his erstwhile assistant, Joe Ryan and Police Captain Herman Cline. About the only principal in the case who enjoyed an ascending career afterwards was Aimee Semple McPherson.

The tide is beginning to turn in the public's perception of the kidnapping of the evangelist. All of the die-hards, when confronted with the evidence supporting Mrs. McPherson's account of her abduction and with the truth about her many-faceted ministry, are willing to rethink their attitudes toward the oft-parroted misrepresentations by the press. Motivation of the media may not be malice but rather, as reporters often told Mrs. McPherson in excusing the bad publicity they gave her, "Aimee good — that's no news. Aimee bad — Wow!"

When the truth has been told, dramatic results have ensued. In 1975 Vicki Haas enrolled in a course at UCLA about the affairs in Los Angeles. This seminar included considerable attention to the career of Aimee Semple McPherson and its main textual source was Lately Thomas' book, *Storming Heaven*. Vicki's pastor, Jack Hayford, phoned me in April and put Vicki on the line to explain the situation. On April 28 I mailed her more than a dozen documents, some of which she shared with her instructor and class. On May 10 she wrote me, "I must tell you I am very excited about the direction the seminar is taking. In these past two weeks there has been a definite change of attitude and tone in the class. *Storming Heaven* is rarely mentioned and the professor has recommended that the students stay away from newspaper sources in their research. They have been scouring every



kind of archive imaginable in the city of Los Angeles which might have any kind of connection or information at all about Mrs. McPherson. They have also gone to Angelus Temple itself and have been very impressed by the receptivity of those at the Temple. In the midst of all this, much positive information has surfaced about Mrs. McPherson. It's really a blessing to watch some of the students begin to take a different position concerning Mrs. McPherson. I believe many of the students who have never known of the Lord will be exposed to Jesus through this class."

The truth is being told, and the verdict is in. Aimee Semple McPherson was really kidnapped as she said.

The End

## Appendix

This appendix provides statements relating to the telecast entitled "The Disappearance of Aimee," released first as a Hallmark "Hall of Fame" show in November, 1976. Hallmark at first reacted defensively when the numerous errors in the story were documented, including the undeniable fact that the entire last eleven minutes of the dramatization was made up completely out of the whole cloth. Bryan Putman, Vice President of Advertising and Public Relations, wrote me on November 24, 1976, "We and our agents were assured by both the National Broadcasting Company and the producing company, Tomorrow Entertainment, that the incidents depicted in the script were factually accurate.

"It is my understanding that the legal staff at NBC prepared a 65-page document to that effect.

"Be that as it may, and in view of the fact that we simply are not in a position to respond to the points enumerated in your letter of November 19, I am asking that Tomorrow Entertainment and NBC reply in detail to your letter. You will be hearing from these organizations shortly." The National Broadcasting Company (NBC) never did submit any documents to me, in spite of repeated proddings from both myself and Hallmark. Sally McGraw, Director of Audience Services did reply to a complaint by Olive G. Cooksey with a letter which proved to be a clone of the production company, Tomorrow Entertainment's correspondence to me. Never at any time did NBC or Tomorrow Entertainment dispute any of the scores of errors of fact which were charged against the production nor offer to honor the request from Hallmark to submit the alleged 65-page document purporting to show that the incidents depicted in the script were factually accurate.

The President of Tomorrow Entertainment in two letters to me virtually conceded the flagrant inaccuracies, misrepresentations, and anachronisms I called to Hallmark's attention. He claimed that I should "understand that far from discrediting Mrs. McPherson, the film depicted a remarkable valiant and courageous woman who stood up to her accusers and won." McGraw's letter to Cooksey contained an identical quote. Would not this circumstance indicate collusion? Personally, I have never met anyone who drew from this film that conclusion, although in fact, Aimee Semple McPherson certainly did stand up to her accusers and win at the time.

Apparently Hallmark likewise was unconvinced by Tomorrow Entertainment's alibis because future letters betrayed a very apologetic tone. By December 17, 1976 William S. Johnson was writing Durella Lane, 370 Montebello Avenue, Ventura, CA, 93003, "The writers of the show ignored the very effective output of her career and focused instead on the events of her time and the controversy of that time. Hallmark reworked the script several times so that we would not take a position on the charges made against her during her life. We had hoped to be neutral and undramatic." In this Hallmark failed completely. An evidence of the show's bias against Mrs. McPherson is the fact that all of the witnesses shown in the depiction of the preliminary hearing were prosecution witnesses called to testify against the evangelist. Not one witness called by the defense was shown on the screen. How viciously the script writers defamed Mrs. McPherson was demonstrated during the dramatization of the testimony by Joseph Ryan. After Ryan's outburst against the evangelist which was accurately represented, denouncing her as a "hypocrite and a fake," the show depicts Mrs. McPherson jumping to her feet and yelling the same epithets at Ryan. Page 1246 of the transcript of the court record, however, shows that Mrs. McPherson made no response whatsoever (cf. lines 25 & 26).

Hallmark's William Johnson continued his reply to Mrs. Lane's letter complaining about the show, "We agree with you. We missed our own high standards. We offended you and others. And, we are sorry. We ask forgiveness."

Nevertheless this production continues being shown, without Hallmark's auspices, on television stations around the country.

Mrs. McPherson's kidnapping earlier became the focus for a monograph, "The Vanishing Evangelist," by "Lately Thomas" (a nom de plume) and figured prominently in the same pseudonymous author's book, "Storming Heaven." Both of Thomas' works are referred to extensively in this book. Robert Bahr's, "Least of All Saints," is not noticed because it admittedly is a "speculative biography" and most of the obvious speculations are utterly incredible.

There is no way that an unbiased investigator who examines not only the evidence the media trumpeted against the evangelist but also the massive evidence available in support of her story, can entertain for a moment the idea that Aimee Semple McPherson was the woman with Kenneth Ormiston at the Carmel cottage. The presentation in this book proves that she was not that woman.

The facts that are given in this book are documented and their sources are identified. Most people have never heard anything but the media's regurgitation of the rumors, innuendoes, and misrepresentations about the episode. However, the facts speak for themselves. This book proves that Aimee Semple McPherson told the truth. The verdict is in. Her life and ministry have stood the test of time.

Raymond L. Cox, Th.D., F.R.G.S.  
Salem, Oregon

Salinas, Cal., July 16—(AP) — Dennis Collins, an attendant at the Salinas garage, today denied that he had told any one that he had positively identified Mrs. Aimee McPherson as a visitor to the garage following her recent disappearance. He said that he had been shown a photograph of Mrs. McPherson but could not identify the photograph as that of the garage visitor.

Collins said that he told Assistant District Attorney Joe Ryan of Los Angeles that the woman who came to the garage seemed much younger than the woman in the photograph, although there were other marked points of resemblance. He did identify Kenneth G. Ormiston, however, as the man who accompanied the woman to the garage. Ormiston now is being sought.

Exact newspaper clipping unknown but shows difficulty in properly identifying the evangelist in "the wild" even by trained professionals

## MRS. SEMPLE M'PHERSON IS LOCATED AT EDMONTON BY CANADIAN AUTHORITIES

(United Press Dispatch)

EDMONTON, Albert, Canada, June 5. — Some doubt is held here today as to whether the woman found here is Aimee Semple McPherson or another woman from Los Angeles.

Selma Argue, sister of Pastor Argue, who is officiating at the McPherson temple in Los Angeles, looked at the woman and said she is not the missing evangelist.

LOS ANGELES, June 5. — Aimee Semple McPherson, missing evangelist, has been found at Edmonton, Canada, according to a telegram received here today by

Chief of Police James A. Davis.

The telegram, signed by Inspector Middleton, international detective, said the revivalist arrived, via Calgary, yesterday in an automobile. The message was as follows:

"Aimee Semple McPherson arrived Friday via Calgary. The car, California license No. D-24-121, a Studebaker, was followed by a car, California license No. D-24-526. She is staying at Corona hotel. She is positively identified by three operators. Mrs. McPherson was known by sender while in Toronto Wire instructions. Inspector Middleton, international detectives."

The woman in this clipping was finally identified as someone else after being interviewed.

# IT'S TIME THE TRUTH BE TOLD . . .

## The Disappearance Of Aimee

For many years publicity-seeking writers have been producing articles about the kidnaping of Aimee Semple McPherson. Their stories, almost always based upon the exaggerated, fictional and unresearched material of former authors, serve only to compound the distortions and inaccuracies of earlier compositions. In most instances the source of the writers' material has been over-dramatic and publicity-baiting newspaper articles. Like the childhood game, each time the story is told, a little more fiction is added and more of the truth deleted.

To set the record straight, let's return to the people who were there, who were involved, let's review the true facts.

First, may we recap the prevailing political situation then current in the City of Los Angeles. High in administrated circles were corrupt officials. Throughout the City gangland conditions existed. Prostitution, gambling, bootlegging, dope peddlers, and crime flourished with political pay-offs and blessing.

Aimee Semple McPherson publicly took a firm stand against these prevailing conditions. Over Radio Station KFSG, she constantly decried and revealed these deplorable situations. As a result, she was considered a very serious threat by these undesirable leaders of crime and vice. It was common knowledge that they desired to "get rid" of her. In spite of threats she persisted in her efforts to see Los Angeles cleaned up.

Public, as well as court records, prove that her efforts were not in vain. A recall election removed these leaders from office. Legal action sent many to prison, including the very leaders who prosecuted Aimee Semple McPherson. It's time that the truth be told. What are the facts?

On May 18, 1926 Aimee Semple McPherson and her secretary pitched a tent on the sands of Ocean Park beach. While Sister worked on her Sunday message prior to a swim (she was an expert swimmer) -- the secretary went to phone the Temple. Upon her return Sister was missing.

Earlier a call had come to Angelus Temple from professedly distraught parents desirous of having Mrs. McPherson pray for a dying child. The callers were advised of Sister's whereabouts.

The couple approached the evangelist on the beach and begged that she go to their car and pray for the child. This was a plea Sister could never resist, for children held a special place in her heart, as any who grew up under her ministry well remember.

At the car, the door was flung open and Sister forced inside. A cloth was pressed to her mouth. Probably it was wet with chloroform. The auto sped away.

Meanwhile the Temple authorities supposed Sister had drowned. They dismissed as pranks ransom demands. A memorial service was held. But no body was found.

Then late in June an exhausted woman arrived across the border from Agua Prieta, Mexico into Douglas, Arizona, and proved to be Aimee Semple McPherson. Subsequently she told a story of abduction which she was called upon to repeat scores of times and pressed to change. But she protested, "I will take this story to my grave. It is the truth!"

Instead of bunting for the kidnapers, officers tried to pick flaws in Sister's story. They concocted a tale that she had spent some of the time she was missing with a former KFSG radio technician in a cottage in Carmel, California.

Deputy District Attorney Ryan, armed with a sheaf of photographs of the Evangelist, endeavored to persuade witnesses that Mrs. McPherson was in fact the woman who occupied the Carmel cottage. Several testified concerning his attempts to badger them into identifications, for example, Henry C. Benedict, owner of the Carmel cottage, who swore, "Ryan tried his d-d-dest to get me to say that I could identify her, and I said I could not."

The Los Angeles District Attorney who directed the case against Mrs. McPherson was noted for a passion in pursuing his prosecutions. Indeed, as he prepared to go to trial against Mrs. McPherson he was shaken by a scathing rebuke by California's Governor Richardson because the Governor had been called upon to issue his sixth pardon to a convict convicted by Keyes whose innocence subsequently had been established.

The testimony against Mrs. McPherson collapsed in a babel of contradictions, meanwhile, a parade of witnesses testified in court that the woman at Carmel was not Aimee Semple McPherson. Jesse Williams testified that he delivered a telegram to the cottage on May 28, 1926. The district attorney pointed out Mrs. McPherson and asked if she was the woman who signed for

the message. He stared at her for a moment, then growled an eloquent, "Naw"! William McMichael, a carpenter who worked at the property line of the cottage and saw the woman in question several times at close range, when asked in court to identify Mrs. McPherson as that woman, exclaimed about the evangelist, "Never saw her before in my life." The Town Marshall of Carmel, Mr. August England, testified that he had been as close as eight feet to the woman and that Mrs. McPherson was "positively not the woman."

Meanwhile, other witnesses furnished expert testimony tending to corroborate Sister's account of her ordeal and escape in Mexico. L. A. Leslie Gatliff and officer O. E. Patterson of the Douglas, Arizona police department, and Deputy U. S. Marshall Sims of Arizona, testified they saw tracks, presumably the evangelist's, throughout the area Sister stated she trekked in freedom.

Sister McPherson received fair treatment from most of the Douglas citizenry and officials and remained grateful for their help and support through the trying ordeal. For that matter, when she stumbled into the little Mexican town of Agua Prieta and sought shelter and help in the first respectable looking house she encountered, it was the Gonzales Family who very likely saved her life. There follows the affidavits of Mr. Gonzales and Douglas Police Officer, G. W. Cook, who was on duty at the Police Station when Mrs. McPherson reached Douglas from Agua Prieta. These affidavits are presented because of press-circulated rumors that Sister arrived in Douglas in a physical condition not compatible with her story of her desert wanderings.

It is noteworthy how many Douglas people went out of their way to demonstrate their faith in Sister McPherson, as the following testimonial voluntarily prepared by these Arizonans at the time indicates:

**AFFIDAVIT OF R. R. GONZALES ESTABLISHING TRUTH OF HER EXHAUSTED PHYSICAL CONDITION UPON REACHING AGUA PRIETA.**

"My name is R. R. Gonzales. I live in Agua Prieta, Son. Mexico. I am forty-five years old.

"On the night of June 23, A.D. 1926, at about 1:30 A.M. a woman came to my house in said town and called out hello three or four times. I then told this woman to come into the house. I asked her what she wanted, if she wanted to telephone and she replied, "Where is the police station?" I did not know who she was. She was very much excited when she came into the house. I went to put my clothes on and when I returned she had gone out of the house and I went out looking for her and found her lying on the ground unconscious or fainted, in the gate, with her feet inside and her head out in the street. My wife was with this woman at the time and told me where to find her. I thought she was dead at the time, she was cold. I got a flash light and looked her over, saw that her eyes were moving and myself and wife picked her up, carried her into the house and put her in bed. I did not know who this woman was at that time but since then she visited my home and she was the same woman that calls herself Aimee Semple McPherson and her pictures were in all of the papers. When this same woman came over to see my wife a few days later her mother and a Douglas, Arizona officer was with her.

"After carrying this woman into the house and putting her to bed and realizing her condition, myself and wife rubbed her arms and head with alcohol. A little later she showed some life and my wife gave her a drink of water. I asked her from where she came and she answered, Los Angeles, Calif. I asked her if she had a husband and she replied not now, and she said she had two children. I asked her where she came from. I could not understand so very well, but she said she had walked some distance, several miles; she had been in a car with two men and a woman by the name of Rosa. She told me a lot more but I could not understand everything she told me. After bathing her head with alcohol and giving her water she seemed much revived. The Presidente of Agua Prieta lived just across the street from me and at about three (3) o'clock A.M. I called said Presidente and he came over to my house. I asked him what we should do with this woman and he said hunt some American who could talk Mexican good and bring him there. I went, also the President, to a saloon owned by Danny or known as the "Gem Saloon". I found a fellow

named Anderson who drives a car for hire and he went to my home with us. Anderson could not speak Spanish so we could learn no more about this woman and we figured it was the best thing to send her to Douglas, Arizona. We put her in the car and she thanked us for what we had done and the driver took her away for the American side. This was near four (4) o'clock A.M., June 23rd, A.D. 1926.

R. R. GONZALES

Subscribed and sworn to before me, at Douglas, Arizona,  
this the 14th day of July, A.D. 1926.

WM. C. JACK

Notary Public in and for Cochise  
County of Arizona.

My commission expires July 31st, A.D. 1926.

#### AFFIDAVIT OF G. W. COOK, POLICE OFFICER

"G. W. Cook, being first duly sworn, says that on the early morning of June 23, 1926, he was the police officer in charge of the police station of the City of Douglas, Cochise County, Arizona, that at approximately 3:45 A.M. of said morning, one John Anderson, a taxi driver, brought Mrs. Aimee Semple McPherson to said Police Station in his car; that affiant then and there observed her condition and that in affiant's opinion she was then in a state of complete physical exhaustion; that because of her said condition affiant immediately took said Mrs. McPherson to the Calumet & Arizona Hospital at Douglas, Arizona; affiant further states that he examined the condition of the clothing and shoes, which Mrs. McPherson was wearing at the time she was brought to said Police Station, immediately after the same were taken from her by the night nurse at said Calumet & Arizona Hospital; that affiant has examined the country directly east of the town of Agua Prieta to the mountain known as 'Nigger Head,' a distance of approximately nine miles; and that the clothing and shoes of a person walking from said 'Nigger Head Mountain' to the town of Agua Prieta would not show any more wear than those worn by Mrs. McPherson at the time she was brought to said police station."

"('Signed) G. W. COOK."

#### TESTIMONIAL FROM REPRESENTATIVE CITIZENS OF DOUGLAS

"This was not gotten up with the purpose of a large number of names, but those of representative citizens.

"We, the undersigned residents of Douglas, Arizona, who have been greatly interested in the mass of charges and countercharges regarding the truth of Mrs. Aimee Semple McPherson's story with regard to her abduction and subsequent reappearance in Douglas, believe:

"That the statements of Mrs. McPherson with regard to her reappearance here, after an escape from her abductors and her consequent walk into Agua Prieta, Sonora, Mexico, as a consequence of her being forced to flee on foot, are true, so far as we have been able to ascertain;

"That there has been no iota of proof adduced here that would in any way tend to disprove any of the statements made by Mrs. McPherson regarding her reappearance, and that as citizens of Douglas, in which city she appeared, and interested in righteousness and truth, we again affirm our belief in the statements she has made."

"(Signed):

A. B. Hinton, Mayor.

Geo. E. Buxton, Pres. Southern Arizona Traffic Assn.

Fred D. Hubbell, Pres. Douglas Chamber of Commerce.

Rex Rice, Rice Company.

James Logie, Publisher Douglas Dispatch.

Alex Saurd, Jr., British Vice-Consul, Douglas.

Conrad Kaiser, Bakery.

J. McKinnan, Vice-Pres. and Cashier Bank of Commerce.

Chas. K. Foster, Post Master.

John B. Krowell, Cashier Bank of Douglas.

R. K. Hanson, Cashier First Nat. Bank

J. P. Ferguson, Prop. Ferguson Drug Store.

H. E. Alexander, Bootblack.

Wm. Alberts, Sec-Treas. Stafford-Alberta Auto Co.

Albert Stacy, Mgr. Bassett Lumber Co.

H. H. Johnson, Studebaker Dealer.

W. F. Thompson, Special Agent, Standard Oil Company.

A. I. Massey, Dentist.

R. L. Hoyal, Jeweler.

J. Hollomon, Hollomon Bros. Hardware Co.

G. I. Rowe, Electrical Shop.

J. D. Casper, Piggly Wiggly Store.

Adolph Sturru, Sanitary Cash Market."



"Sister McPherson swore she had been kidnaped. 'Had I gone away willingly, I would not have come back,' she told the Grand Jury. 'I would rather never have been born than to have caused this blow to God's work.' Later she told reporters, 'As God is my judge, I am innocent. As I expect to meet my God, my story is true.' And her story was never shaken. At the time most Californians, according to journalist H. L. Mencken, believed her. And no wonder! Those who testified against her proved to be most untrustworthy characters. At one time witnesses placed her in 16 places at once! The case against Sister sounded like a modern Babel, as God seemed to confuse the tongues of her attackers. Each told a different story. The 'star witness' changed her tale so often she got the reputation as 'the hoax woman.' Investigation revealed she had been committed to a Utah insane asylum for ungovernable lying. The district attorney who prosecuted (persecuted would be a better word) subsequently was sentenced to San Quentin over irregularities in his office which the conduct of the McPherson case brought to light. The careers of both investigators who tried to link Sister with the Carmel cottage were ruined in shambles. But Sister's work continued. The conspiracy collapsed. The case against her had to be dismissed because the witnesses kept changing their stories. 'Extra! Aimee Wins! Case Dismissed!' the newsboys shouted. Headlines blared, 'Mrs. McPherson Cleared!'

On that night in early January, 1927, a scene took place in Angelus Temple which surely never occurred in any church before. As Sister swept down the rampart a tumultuous ovation which continued, some say, for more than twenty minutes greeted her. Thunderous applause almost always hailed her entry into the Temple. But this time horns of all descriptions, whistles, drums, tambourines, even tincans, made one sound to cheer the vindicated evangelist. It was the only time in her career that Aimee Semple McPherson failed to control a crowd. Her gestures for silence were long ignored.

From a legal standpoint Aimee Semple McPherson stood fully vindicated by the District Attorney's dismissal of all charges against her. This conclusion was at the time eloquently urged by a distinguished jurist and lawyer, Jacob B. Denney, ex-judge of the 58th Judicial Circuit of Indiana and a member of the California Bar. Here is Judge Denney's statement:

"The vindication of Mrs. McPherson could not be more complete. It is infinitely stronger than if it had been determined by a jury after hearing all the evidence and resulting in an absolute acquittal. A jury passing on the case would naturally be supposed to be unbiased and to give an unprejudiced decision. But in the present case, the State of California, with all its machinery, power and prestige, spent many thousands of dollars in the investigation of the truth of the charges which it had made against this woman. These charges they admitted were all false.

"In addition to the ordinary investigation which is made by state officials, this case, by reason of its having excited national interest, was given special attention; for more than half a year the entire resource of the State of California was devoted to the unearthing of evidence against Mrs. McPherson; special agents were employed in great numbers to trace down every remote rumor that might throw light on the case.

"All of this evidence collected was reviewed by the officers themselves most interested in procuring a conviction and naturally supposed to be highly hostile to the defendant. This tribunal themselves determined that there was not sufficient evidence against the defendant even to justify placing her on trial before an unprejudiced jury.

"Seldom, if ever, in the history of American or English jurisprudence has so signal a vindication been achieved without a single gun being fired by the defendant in her own defense."

Had the officers concentrated their efforts on a search for the kidnapers, the case conceivably could have been closed in a relatively short time.

The Los Angeles newspapers had a vested interest in prolonging the story. And while neither the papers nor the courts could prove any discrepancy in Sister's story at the time, the press has continued to reap profits from reprints and enlargements of the story. Most people who research the incident today confine their investigations to studying these press clippings.

There is no reasonable alternative, when all the evidence is weighed, to Mrs. McPherson's account of her ordeal. It happened as she described it. Not one point of her story was ever refuted. The International Church of the Foursquare Gospel would prefer that the incident be left buried in the archives of the past, for our message is JESUS CHRIST and not the personality of our Founder. But because the constant rehearsing of the event by the press creates questionings in the minds of those who have never heard the truth concerning the kidnapping, this explanation has been prepared for distribution. It does not profess to answer all the questions broachable about the incident, but it does embrace the salient issues.

Captured text of news article  
Charge Aimee facts withheld

CT-1

Madera Tribune, Number 64, January 18, 1927.  
Charge Aimee Facts Withheld p. 4

It having been charged by those of an impartial mind interested in the Aimee McPherson case that the entire facts have not been given to the public, it is desired by neutral parties in Madera that the following from the Angeles Sentinel as given to the people of Madera: In an interview with Constable O. A. Ash of Douglas, Arizona, a special staff correspondent of the San Bernardino Daily Sun, in a recent issue, reports that Constable Ash denounces the prosecution and the Los Angeles press. He declares that "honest facts concerning the case of Aimee Semple McPherson have been withheld from the public" and that Los Angeles newspapers had deliberately misinformed their readers regarding important phases of the evangelist's kidnapping story.

The Daily Sun story follows: "The constable stopped in Redlands this morning to visit his aunt and uncle, the Rev. and Mrs. Geo. Garner of the Citrus avenue M. R. Church, South, before continuing his return Journey from Los Angeles, where he testified on behalf of Mrs. McPherson. "In the first place," Constable Ash stated, "there is no such place as the desert with scorching sands, prickly cactus and the kind of brush that would tear clothes and scratch shoes; that is there is no such region in the district where Mrs. McPherson was said to have made her escape from the famous shack of Agua Prieta. I don't know why the public has been misled concerning the topography of that country, because that so called Sonora desert is the other extreme. It is grassy country, ideal pasture land, with plenty of springs of water. The altitude of that misnamed 'desert' is 5000 feet.

"And 'Aimee's shack' has been found," he continued. "I have seen the five-gallon oil can which was used by Mrs. McPherson to cut her bonds. Her hands and feet were not bound with rope, but with strips of cloth similar to bed ticking. "Los Angeles newspapers certainly can lie. While eating my lunch in Los Angeles the other day I purchased a newspaper which gave a full account of the testimony of M. R. Irvine, a photographer from Douglas. But Irvine had not yet been on the witness stand and did not get to testify until two and one-half hours after I read his alleged testimony in the paper. Furthermore, In several instances when I answered 'yes' on the witness stand, I was quoted in the newspapers as saying 'no.' Witnesses have been misquoted in many instances.



"Great concern is roused because of the report that Mrs. McPherson had hiked 20 miles across the wild desert without scarring her shoes and tearing her clothes into shreds. Please observe that the shoes I now have on have not the slightest scratch, yet I walked days and nights over the grassy country in search of Mrs. McPherson's trail. Mrs. McPherson's ankles were swollen from the long walk she took. I noticed the swelling, I also saw holes in her stockings, though the newspapers denied this. One pocket was torn from her gingham dress, too. When I testified in Los Angeles on Tuesday and Wednesday I wore a silk-finished alpaca suit which contained no blemishes, despite the tact that I had worn it constantly two days and two nights when I finally arrived at the shack which the evangelist had described to me."

"In my opinion, the shack is about 18 miles from Douglas. The evangelist guessed she had walked 20 miles. The maximum temperature reached the day Mrs. McPherson walked across the grassy country was 96 degrees; at least, that's what it was in Douglas. "John Anderson, the cab driver who brought Mrs. McPherson across the border at the request of the mayor of Agua Prieta, did not heed the mayor's order to take her to the hospital because the woman in a semi-conscious condition continually called for the police. Therefore, Anderson took her first to the Douglas police station. That is how I learned of the case immediately. I had been a police officer or a deputy sheriff since 1899, and I am now serving my second term as constable. "I know the border country well and I have had

considerable training in tracking. So when I heard the evangelist's story I organized a party to search for the shack and to hunt for the kidnapers.

"Accompanied by an Indian and Leslie Gatllff, lieutenant of the Douglas police department, I backtrailed Mrs. McPherson, following her tracks along a fence which runs due east from Douglas toward Niggerhead mountain. After going nine miles we followed the woman's tracks south along the Galardo ranch fence for another nine miles. During this latter stretch there was a distance of nearly two miles where the trail could not be found because of cattle tracks. Our first trip was a failure.

"Then, on August 18 that was after Mrs. McPherson had returned to that region to help offices hunt the cabin where she had been held prisoner we found the shack that the evangelist and the other officers failed to find. Lieutenant Gatlitf was the first to spy the place.

The shack was really a miner's cabin at the abandoned San Juan gold and copper mine.

"In this shack we found the can which has been opened with canopener, and we could see that the rough edge had been used to cut the bed ticking strips which apparently had bound the woman's wrists and ankles. Incidentally, I saw the marks made on Mrs. McPherson's wrists by these strips, although the Los Angeles papers denied there were any marks. There was no furniture of any kind in the house when we visited it. "In conclusion I might add that California certainly has some prize winning liars."

The San Bernardino Sun correspondent goes on to say that Constable Ash, together with his uncle, the Rev. Mr. Gardiner, spent half an hour in the Redlands office of the San Bernardino Sun, describing the evangelist's case as he saw it.

He admitted that he knew little concerning the pastor and her work but he is confident she is the victim of much misrepresentation. The Douglas constable is a man of middle age, appears sincere and truthful, and he proudly displays the emblem of the Masonic lodge.